

AN INVITATION



Mark 1:14-20

God made you. God knows you. He knows you better than you know yourself. He loves you. He knows that you have struggled in your life. People have hurt you. You have also done some bad things. But He still loves you. He wants to forgive you, and to help you.

You are also searching for meaning in life. You wonder: Is there purpose in life? Or is life just about being born, growing, learning, working, marrying, raising children, growing old, and dying? Is that it? And does it all end in nothingness? God wants to help you discover His purpose for the world and for you; He wants to help you discover that you long, above all, for Him.

God has not been silent in the world. He has made Himself known. Not all have been open to His voice. We human beings get confused. We have often been confused about what is true, what is good, what is beautiful, and what brings true happiness. He's here to help.

God has revealed Himself to us most fully in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the eternal Son of God Who became man, Who became one of us, at a certain point in history, but in a way that affects all times and places. He lived, died, and rose from the dead for us. He did all this to draw close to us, to teach us, to be an example, to show us love, to forgive and heal us, and to lead us through this life to eternal life with God in heaven. Jesus continues to guide us in every age through the Catholic Church.

Through Jesus, God calls you personally. He calls you by name. He calls you into relationship with Him; He calls you into His family, the Holy Catholic Church. You are invited to say yes to His invitation. You are invited on a journey into the heart of God.

RCIA at St. Dominic Church

What is RCIA?

R.C.I.A., which stands for “Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults,” is:

- A graced journey into relationship with God through Christ
- An embracing of all He wants to teach and give us
- A guided entrance into the Catholic Church
- A prepared reception of God’s grace in the Sacraments

Why go through RCIA?

Our hearts are restless until they rest in God. In committing to the RCIA journey, we find all that we are looking for: we find God and all He wants for us.

What are the essential components of RCIA?

1. *Intellectual Component:* God wants us to *know* Him, to love Him with “all our *mind*,” and to *study and imbibe* the fullness of *truth* He reveals to us in Jesus. Therefore, RCIA involves weekly group meetings of systematic instruction in the Catholic Faith.
2. *Discipleship Component:* RCIA is not just about attending classes and learning, however. In Christ, God calls us to conversion of life, and to seek His will in all aspects of our lives. Jesus calls all who follow Him, with His help and guidance, to cultivate our relationship with God and to put into practice what we believe. This “living out” of our faith involves daily personal prayer, turning away from all sin, and striving to do good and live virtuously in all aspects of our life within the family of the Church. It also involves being faithful in attending Mass every Sunday and Holy Day, going to Confession regularly (after having made one’s first Confession), being a good example to others, being patient with the faults of other Christians, and contributing one’s time and gifts to the Church.

Your RCIA instructors will help guide you in these components through weekly group meetings, through personal meetings to see how you are doing, and through occasional activities outside of these meetings, such as a church tour, times of prayer, pilgrimages, and service opportunities. You will not be pressured into anything, and you are welcome simply to attend the instructional meetings even if you are not yet ready to embrace the Catholic Faith.

Stages of the Journey

The Church marks and blesses the different stages of your journey into the Catholic Faith. For all, there is first a stage of inquiry, in which someone feels called to grow in faith and relationship with God. This is a time marked by promptings of grace, prayer, exploration, searching, questioning, and conversation with good and informed Catholics. RCIA classes usually begin in this stage.

Once someone is committed to discipleship and entering the Catholic Church, there is a period of instruction called the “Catechumenate.” A “Rite of Acceptance” begins this for those not yet baptized, and a “Rite of Welcoming” for those already baptized but not yet Catholic. These rites take place at the Catholic Church where you are taking instruction (St. Dominic Church in this case). From this point on, those seeking baptism are called “catechumens,” while those already baptized but not yet Catholic are called “candidates.”

Then, at the beginning of Lent, a “Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion” takes place at the National Basilica of the Immaculate Conception. This is for both catechumens and candidates. All in RCIA throughout the Archdiocese of Washington gather for this ceremony with the Bishop. Beginning with this ceremony, the catechumens are called “elect.”

This all leads to the Easter Vigil (the most solemn service of the year on the night before Easter Sunday) when the elect are baptized into the Church, and when they also receive Confirmation and First Communion. In the same Mass, candidates (already baptized) make a profession of faith, are received into the Catholic Church, and receive Confirmation and Holy Communion. The Easter Vigil Mass takes place at St. Dominic Church. After the Easter Vigil, weekly instructions continue until mid-May. This period of instruction after reception into the Church and receiving her Sacraments is called “Mystagogy,” and is designed to fortify people in their new faith.

RCIA, then, involves all these stages from beginning to end. It is a period of formation and preparation designed to help someone learn, live, and grow and flourish in their newfound Catholic Faith for the rest of their lives. The following page shows how we mark out these stages in the calendar year.

The Calendar

PERIOD OF INQUIRY / PRE-CATECHUMENATE *before & at beginning of RCIA*

- RCIA classes are on *Mondays 7-8:30pm from September 9 to May 11* in our Parish Meeting Room.
- There will be no classes on the following dates: December 23 & 30
- Besides these, there might be an occasional cancellation.
- All missed classes will require a make-up session. One of the RCIA leaders will coordinate all make-up sessions. Please do all you can not to miss classes.

PERIOD OF CATECHUMENATE / CANDIDACY

On a Sunday 10:30am Mass in November or December we will celebrate the *Rite of Acceptance* for those ready to seek baptism and the *Rite of Welcoming* for baptized Christians seeking full communion with the Catholic Church.

PERIOD OF ELECTION & PURIFICATION

March 8 (Sun) 3pm *Rite of Election* at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception

For Those To be baptized:

March 15 (Sun) 10:30am Mass at St. Dominic Church - *1st Scrutiny & Creed*

March 22 (Sun) 10:30am Mass at St. Dominic Church – *2nd Scrutiny*

March 29 (Sun) 10:30am Mass at St. Dominic Church - *3rd Scrutiny & Our Father*

Arranged Time: First Confession for those already baptized

CELEBRATION & MYSTAGOGY

April 11 (Sat)

- *Rehearsal & Confession Opportunity* (afternoon: usually 1pm)
- *EASTER VIGIL*: 8pm at St. Dominic Church

Monday classes continue until . . .

May 18 *What Next?* (Last RCIA class)

Holy Expectations for You

RCIA is a blessed journey that comes with its expectations and responsibilities. These expectations / responsibilities are basically three, but each has a few essential components to it. In order to truly be faithful to Christ, to enter the Catholic Church, and to receive the Sacraments at the Easter Vigil, it will be necessary to meet these basic expectations to complete the journey that is RCIA.

1. Catholic Belief

Being Catholic means saying ‘yes’ to Jesus Christ and to all that He desires for us. The Catholic Faith is simply the fullness of the Faith that Jesus has given to us. Because of this, there is a beautiful *wholeness* to the Catholic Faith, and it only makes sense to become Catholic when one is ready to embrace sincerely this wholeness, when one is ready to believe truly and embrace all that the Catholic Church believes and officially teaches. It is not expected that everyone would be ready to embrace this fullness from the beginning. It is good to learn what something is about before consenting to it, and you will have many questions. However, it will be necessary to say ‘yes’ to Christ and embrace the Catholic Faith in its fullness, from the heart, at sometime before the Easter Vigil in order to enter the Catholic Church formerly and receive her Sacraments. At the beginning, all we ask is that you come with an open mind and heart, open and willing to say ‘yes’ to all that God wants for you. Faith is a gift that God wants to give you. God will help you to say ‘yes’ to Him, and to grow in your faith through the journey of RCIA and beyond.

2. Catholic Practice

We are called to live what we believe. Practicing the Catholic Faith means seeking to follow Christ in all areas of life. Following Christ involves: daily prayer, growing in our relationship with God through our Catholic Faith, pursuing God’s will, seeking forgiveness and turning away from sin, going to Confession regularly, attending Mass on Sundays and Holy Days and receiving the Eucharist, living virtuously, and serving others. In a particular way, one’s romantic relationships must be in conformity with the Gospel. All are expected to reserve sexual intimacy to marriage and to make sure one’s marriage situation is aligned with the teaching of Jesus and His Church. The priest will be happy to help people as much as possible in the situation in which a marriage not recognized by the Catholic Church needs to be “blessed,” or when an annulment is necessary before a marriage can be blessed. Lastly, it is very important to have the firm intention to persevere in your Faith for the rest of your life. Saying ‘yes’ to God means entrusting to Him your whole life journey, not just one stage of it.

3. Commitment to RCIA

RCIA is a year of grace and formation in the Catholic Faith. It is very important that persons commit themselves and give top priority to this journey. Specifically, one is expected to make the weekly meetings on time, the activities, and the important dates that bless one’s journey along the way. People are also expected to study and do the weekly assignments on their own. Please notify Fr. Hyacinth early concerning any classes or activities you cannot make. It will be necessary to make arrangements with him to make up any missed classes. On a practical note, it will be necessary to provide Fr. Hyacinth with the records of any sacraments you have received already.

Participating in Mass

The *Mass* is a celebration of Christ's love. In the Mass, the family of Christ's believers, the Church, gathers together all over the world with the risen Christ to offer worship through Him to the Father in the Holy Spirit. It is a celebration of joy, involving two basic parts: a hearing of the Word of God, and the offering and partaking of a Sacred Meal. Sunday is the principal day for the celebration of Mass, since it is on Sunday that Christ rose from the dead. Sunday is also associated with creation and the sending of the Holy Spirit on the feast of Pentecost. It is the joy, but also the obligation and duty, of Catholics to attend Mass every Sunday. There are also six Holy Days of Obligation during the year that often fall outside of Sunday, and Catholics are expected to attend Mass as well on these days. Churches offer Masses at various times on these days to accommodate people's work schedules.

Mass is also offered daily for those who are able and desirous of benefiting from the blessings of the Mass more often than just once a week.

In the early Church, *Catechumens* (those learning to be disciples of Christ and preparing to enter the Church through the reception of the Sacraments) would attend the first part of the Mass, but would leave for the second part of the Mass. They would only be admitted to the second part of the Mass once they were baptized and received Confirmation and First Communion at the Easter Vigil. Here at St. Dominic Church, since we do not have a formal program of instruction to offer catechumens after they attend the first part of Mass (since we meet on a weekday evening), we invite you to come every Sunday and stay for the whole Mass.

Those who haven't yet received their First Communion in the Catholic Church will have to wait till the Easter Vigil before receiving Holy Communion. In the meantime, we invite you to come forward at Communion time to receive a blessing from the priest. To do this, make sure to get in the Communion line where a priest is distributing Holy Communion. When you come up to the priest, put your hands on your shoulders by crossing your arms. This will indicate to the priest that you would like to receive a blessing instead of receiving Holy Communion. Many find it hard to wait until Easter before receiving Holy Communion, especially if they have regularly received communion in their own church for a while. However, work to see this time as an opportunity to appreciate what is unique about Holy Communion in the Catholic Church, namely, that it is the Body and Blood of Christ that we receive, and to long patiently and lovingly for this great Gift.

The Mass might be very new and a little confusing at first, but with time you will better understand, more greatly appreciate, and fall in love with, the Mass. With time, you will be able to better understand, more greatly appreciate, and fall in love with the Mass. Please never hesitate to ask us questions or to bring us concerns. In the meantime, we invite you to open your heart to being enriched in your own way by the Mass.

Your Sacramental Records

As soon as possible, we need to receive updated sacramental records of all who are preparing to receive any Sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion) at the Easter Vigil. You should aim to have this done before Christmas.

How do I obtain my Sacramental Records?

If you were baptized Catholic, contact the Church where you were baptized and request that a new copy of your baptismal certificate (including all notations) be sent us (St. Dominic Church, Attention: Fr. Hyacinth Marie Cordell, OP). Note that, if everything was done correctly, notification of any sacraments received after baptism should have been sent to your church of baptism when you received those sacraments. Therefore, in your baptismal registry, there should be notes about when and where you received any other sacraments. When you contact the church of your baptism, be sure to ask that all notifications in your baptismal registry be included in the new baptismal certificate sent to us. If something is lacking, you will need to contact the Church where you received First Communion, for example, asking them to send you an updated record, AND to be sure to send notification to the church of your baptism (what they should have done after you received that sacrament).

If you are not Catholic, we will need proof of your baptism sent to us from the church where you were baptized. If no certificate is obtainable, you will need to request that someone who was present at your baptism (ideally 18 years old or older at the time) write a letter attesting to the fact, including where and when the baptism took place, who the minister was, which baptismal formula was used (normally “I baptized you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” while immersing the person or pouring water over his/her head), and who was present, especially godparents—as much as the witness can recall.

See Fr. Hyacinth right away about any questions or concerns.

Finding a Sponsor

Each person in RCIA chooses a person to sponsor him/her, namely a faithful Catholic you can look to for support, and as a mentor, guide, and an example of how to live out one's Christian Faith. Talk with Fr. Hyacinth about whom you would like to ask. The requirements of a sponsor are the following:

- Be a practicing Catholic (praying daily, going to Mass on Sundays and Holy Days, striving to live one's faith out in daily life, striving to overcome sin, etc.)
- Have received the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and First Communion
- Be in good standing with the Church*
- Be at least at Least 16 Years Old
- Not be a parent of the Candidate
- Attend, as much as possible, the weekly RCIA meetings
- Attend your special liturgical ceremonies

After you have consulted with Fr. Hyacinth about the sponsor you have decided upon, make sure that your sponsor is given the sheet on the privileges and expectations of being a sponsor, and that he/she completes and returns the sponsor form to Fr. Hyacinth as well. Both of these can be found in your binder.

* A Catholic in "Good Standing" is a Catholic whose work, membership in organizations, volunteering, advocacy, and marriage (or romantic relationship before marriage) are all in conformity with the teaching of Christ and the Catholic Church. Examples of Catholics not in good standing would include those who work for an immoral company (e.g., Planned Parenthood), those who belong to an organization that is contrary to the Church (e.g., the KKK or Freemasons), those who advocate for causes contrary to the Gospel (e.g., "gay marriage"), and those who are in a romantic relationship at odds with the norms of Christ and the Church (e.g., sexually active outside of marriage—whether heterosexual or homosexual, or married outside the Church).

Choosing a Patron Saint

It is Catholic tradition that those preparing for the sacraments of Baptism or Confirmation would choose the name of a patron saint. The idea is that you would choose a saint you look up to as an example and a special intercessor on your behalf, and a saint you feel a special connection to. You will be called by this name when you are baptized or confirmed. However, there is no expectation that you seek a legal name change or that you would change the way you are normally called by family and friends.

You may choose any saint you like. Some choose a favorite biblical saint. Some choose a saint who is similar to them (same country of origin or profession or interest, etc.). Don't hesitate to ask for ideas. You can also search for ideas online.