

**The RCIA
(Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults)
An Introduction
Week # 1**

“The rite of Christian initiation presented here 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. By God’s help they will be strengthened spiritually during their preparation and at the proper time will receive the sacraments fruitfully. The initiation of catechumens is a gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful.”

(Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults pp#1)



The RCIA Process as discussed on film

- **Witnesses RCIA** process the same, but journey of each is unique
- **Structure** (Components: intellectual, moral, liturgical, service/charity)

Pre-Catechumenate – searching (Inquiry)

Ends with a ritual celebration (Rite of Acceptance) introducing

Catechumenate – listening / reflection

Ends with a ritual celebration (Rite of Election) introducing

Purification / Enlightenment – final preparation / choosing

Ends with a final celebration (Rite of Initiation) introducing

Mystagogy – living reflection of mystery

Ends with Pentecost – never ends

RCIA – St. Mary's Program

- Introduction into St. Mary community life (faith, sacrament / worship, government)
- Sharing in parish mission of life in Gospel (parishioners living it out)
- A particular experience, not the "ideal" experience
Participant task: living the experience
Parish task: support and caring of participants

Monday Evening Program

Gospel reflection
Information
Break
Witness
Business
Information and Discussion

What is Catholic?

Jesus Christ to 1066 AD

No definition

Doctrinal split – East and West

1066 AD to Reformation

Split of West (Reform of West)

1540 (Reformation) to Present

Emphasis of difference

Tour of Parish

(Route – Church to Rectory to Parish Center)

Church

- **Vestibule (High Street door)**
 - **2 parish statues**
 - **location of bulletins, information**
 - **book racks, bulletin boards**
 - **holy water**
- **Main church space**
 - **confession room**
 - **choir loft**
 - **side entrance**
 - **windows and stations of the cross**
 - **2 main statues on sides**
- **Sanctuary**
 - **baptismal font**
 - **altar of sacrifice (out front, smaller)**
 - **altar of reservation (against wall, larger)**
Greek letters meaning: "Jesus Christ the Victor"
(IC / Jesus XC / Christ NIKA / Victor)
 - **tabernacle**

Church – Rectory

- **sacristy – (room of preparation and supplies)**
- **back offices**
- **breeze way waiting area**

Rectory

- **main office – restroom**
- **pastor's office, living quarters**
- **rectory basement rooms – walk through**

Parish Center

- **outdoor stair entrance to parish center**
- **hallway – location of music books, bulletins, bulletin boards, info tables, book racks**
- **main worship space – choir area, ambo, altar**
- **sacristy – room of preparation and supplies**
- **library**
- **Education supply room**
- **Poplar St. Entrance – ground floor – information table, bulletin board, stain glass, restrooms, kitchen**
- **Parking area**

Tour of Parish

(Route –Parish Center to Rectory to Church)

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Inside a Catholic Church

We enter the church through the foyer, which is called a **vestibule**. In years gone by, when people walked to church, this area served as a shelter from the elements as well as a gathering place. Announcements and reading material is also available here. Since Vatican II, the vestibule serves liturgical functions: a vesting place for the priest and the starting point for the entrance Procession on Sundays and feast days.

When a Catholic steps into the Church, he or she dips his or her fingers into a **holy water** font at the door and blesses him or herself. This gesture not only has its origins in the ancient practice of purification before prayer, but it serves as a reminder of one's baptism. In making the sign of the cross, a Catholic ought to also renew one's baptismal commitment in his or her heart.

Some churches have preserved the ancient custom of remembering the poor and less fortunate, by providing a **poor box** at the entrance. It is in keeping with the custom of the early Christians who "shared all things in common." (Acts 2: 44)

The **nave** of the church, where the congregations gather for worship, ordinarily is equipped with pews and kneelers, which are arranged either in rows or in a circle around the altar. In large cathedrals or basilicas, the nave may be bare and have room for standing. Today some churches also use movable furniture to accommodate different sizes of congregations.

Church **décor** varies. It may be decorated in striking bold colors, subdued pastels, or plain plaster. Paneling, murals, frescoes, marble columns, mosaics, or wooden beams are a few of the many options for interior church designs. Furthermore, seasonal decorations enhance or call attention to particular church seasons or celebrations.

No matter what the décor, an air of reverence and quiet pervades the church, which is conducive to prayer. This is partly due to the lighting effects. Since the Middle Ages, multicolored **stained-glass windows** have been used in churches to add to the devotion. The exquisite artistry of Bible scenes and saints etched in glass provided meaningful visual aids for the commoners who were illiterate. The stained glass windows were often called the "Bible of the Poor". Modern churches still use stained glass, but often they are designed with contemporary liturgical symbols.

The fourteen **stations of the cross**, which portray the Passion and death of Jesus, adorn the walls or back of the church. These stations usually are plaques, statues, or simple crosses. Early Christians traced the steps of Christ in Jerusalem during his Passion. After the Moslems conquered the Holy Land, the pilgrimages temporarily ceased and "stations" were placed in churches as a pious devotion. In 1731, the general features of the stations became uniform and special blessings and indulgences were attached to meditating on Christ's Passion. In order to complete the Paschal Mystery theology, some parishes have unofficially added a fifteenth station, resurrection.

Devotions to the saints take a secondary position in a Catholic's faith life since Vatican II reemphasized the importance of liturgy and the sacraments. But in many churches **statues** of saints or angels may be on a pedestal, in a niche, or on a side altar. There are fewer or no statues in modern churches. However, statues of Mary, St. Joseph, the Sacred Heart, and ST. Anthony retain their popularity.

Vigil lights, glass vials containing candles, or in line with modern technology, small electric lights triggered when a coin is put into the slot, may burn before the statues or in a separate stand. A candle is lit to pray for a special intention or for the soul of a loved one. Catholics believe prayers can assist the dead who may be in purgatory to atone for their sins. A candle, too, symbolizes a constant presence. One's prayers continue through the light left burning when we cannot be present.

To an outsider, the most foreboding and curious feature of a Catholic Church is the **confessional**. This darkened alcove where one "goes to confession" HAS OFTEN BEEN A STUMBLING BLOCK FOR PROSPECTIVE CONVERTS. The shift in theology of Vatican II aimed to make the confessional less ominous, although private confession of sin still is a vital aspect of Catholic belief and practice.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation today is meant to be a healing experience of the compassionate Christ, and so one no longer need to confess in the darkness of the confessional. One can opt for a face to face confession in which the person who confesses faces the priest and, in an informal way, asks to be forgiven and healed. To accommodate this option, churches have **reconciliation rooms** with soft chairs and ample lighting.

Some churches also make room for both preferences by a creative innovation. The confessional has been altered so that one side can be used for traditional closed-box, anonymous confessions, and the other side with the screen removed is replaced with a comfortable chair and light for face-to-face confessions.

In most churches, a separate place is reserved for baptisms. This **baptistry** can either be a simple font with a bowl or a separate room. Baptism is usually done by pouring water on the head. But baptism by immersion, in which the person is briefly submerged in water, is permitted and some churches may have a pool-like baptistry.

The most sacred and focal point in a Catholic Church is the **sanctuary**, where the liturgy is offered. An altar is the chief furnishing in the sanctuary. It is elevated and faces the people, either in the front of the church or in the center with pews surrounding it. The altar is the table of the Lord's Supper and the sacrifice. It is unadorned when not in use. Within the sanctuary, chairs for the celebrants and participants, a pulpit, and a lectern hold prominent positions.

The **tabernacle** contains consecrated hosts, which are used at Communion or taken to the sick. This cabinet-like receptacle is kept locked and secured. A **sanctuary lamp** burns continuously before the tabernacle, to remind us of Christ's sacramental presence. A Catholic shows respect for the Eucharist by **genuflecting** on one knee or bowing when one passes the tabernacle or enters the pew.

The Word of God is an essential part of Catholic faith. The **Book of the Gospels** is carried solemnly at the entrance procession, incensed at solemn occasions, and enthroned in a prominent place in the sanctuary.

A room called the **sacristy** which means "holy place", is where the sacred vessels, vestments, and other items used during liturgy are prepared and stored. In a small sink, the **sacrarium**, the sacred vessels are washed after being used at Mass.

Music has always played an important role in worship. The organ usually dominates the choir area, sometimes found in a loft or at the front, back, or side of the church. With the liturgical renewal, other instruments, such as guitars, flutes, violins, trumpets, pianos, and electronic keyboards have come into use.

Art works and other symbols, which enhance one's faith, are appropriate in a church setting.

Other facilities to serve specific needs also may be provided. Some churches supply a **cry room**, fitted with a glass front, for parents with babies. Ramps and pews reserved for those in wheelchairs make it possible for the disabled to join in worship. This is all in an effort to be sensitive to the needs of others.

These are the main features one can expect to find in a Catholic Church. Each church has its own character and décor. Some of what was expressed here is not essential, but all expressions are helpful.

The Parish – Variations and Styles

The Catholic Church may seem totally uniform, but closer scrutiny soon shows that this is not the case, especially when considering the local parish. In size and character, in style and management, parishes are as varied as the colors of the spectrum. There are sprawling suburban parishes where worshipers by the thousands converge each Sunday after having traveled many miles and parking in stadium sized parking lots. These congregations may be as mobile as their mode of transport.

There are inner city parishes, sandwiched between skyscrapers and suffering from urban blight. Their parishioners include the homeless, the victimized, the poor. Small rural parish churches dot the open prairies of the Midwest. There are intimate neighborhood parishes where generations of family members have worshipped. Each parish assumes the character of those who comprise it, since the **parish basically is people**. Parishes vary, too, according to size, location, ethnic origins, and leadership.

A parish is usually set up when there is sufficient evidence that a viable community of faith can flourish. A parish is given the name of a saint or truth of faith, for example, St. Joseph Parish or Holy Trinity Parish. Most often territorial with clearly defined boundaries, a parish is the responsibility of the pastor. The Catholic population is determined by a census of the area.

Ethnic parishes, established for persons of the same cultural background, nationality, and language were most prevalent when waves of immigrants settled in a particular neighborhood. The people retained their own language and customs of their native land.

Today, ethnic parishes stemming from Europe are fading from the scene. However, there is a rise in Hispanic parishes, especially in urban centers and the Southwest. Sometimes, a parish is set up for a specific group of people at military bases or on college campuses. A mission parish is set up when there are enough parishioners to warrant a parish. There is no resident clergy, so a neighboring parish usually serves it.

The Parish Complex

The parish church is an important center for one's faith life. Here one is baptized, worships, marries, and from here one is buried. The parish attempts to minister to the spiritual needs of all its members.

The architectural style of a church reflects the faith for which it was built. Whether made of stone, brick, wood, marble, or clapboard, the parish church stands as a testimony of Christ present today. The pointed spires of church steeples dominate many skylines and are an ever-present reminder of people's need to turn to God in prayer, like hands folded in prayer. Churches also have been modeled on Greek and Roman temples with rounded domes and sturdy columns.

Architecture reflects the thinking of the times. And so, since Vatican II, the trend has turned to reverential simplicity or modern styles. For an interesting study, drive around your town and note the variations of architecture in all the churches.

When immigration of Catholics was at its height, the education of the children received priority. In order to preserve and pass on the faith and to provide for a well-rounded education, **parochial schools** were set up by most parishes. In fact, the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1884 ordered that, where possible, every parish Church should have a school.

Parochial schools usually have been staffed by sisters of teaching religious communities; they live in homes called **convents**.

However, the parochial school system, while still part of parish life, has undergone drastic change, due to rising costs, fewer vocations to the sisterhood, and government regulations, such as busing, certification requirements, and aid to private schools. Many schools have either closed completely or consolidated. Lay personnel make up the majority of parochial school staffs.

These changes ought not to be regarded as the demise of the parochial school system or a weakening of faith. Today, there still are about seven thousand parochial elementary schools in the United States.

Parishes also are becoming more aware of the need to provide for the continuing religious formation of all its people, not just its children. Adult education and continuing adult spiritual formation programs have received more attention in recent years.

In order to accommodate itself to the diverse needs in the Church, parishes may include an all-purpose community center in their plans with facilities to serve different and varied groups. The Scouts, Knights of Columbus, Rosary Society, Legion of Mary, Prayer Groups, Bible Study Groups, all may find space to gather in the parish facilities. A parish reaches beyond its boundaries to the needs of the community. You may find a day-care center, food pantry, AA meetings, shelter for the homeless, a thrift shop or library facilities.

Principal Mass Furniture

Lectern / Ambo

- "Table of the Word" – that is why the lectern and the altar are designed in a similar fashion, material, etc. they are both tables from which we receive Jesus.
- Carry over from Jewish synagogue *berna*, a raised area with a reading desk where the Word of God was proclaimed.

Altar

- "Table of the Lord" – where the "sacrifice of the cross is made present under sacramental signs (*General Instruction of The Roman Missal*)"
- early Christian communities only had one altar which was the presence of the one Christ, and which they gathered around for the sacred mysteries (it was the focal point).
- Made of natural materials only – preferably stone, but wood, etc is okay.
- Carry over from the Book of Exodus and use of cloth for screens,
- Development from seat (*cathedra*) or chair of the bishop – as church grew presbyters took on ministry of bishop outside metropolitan areas – if present bishop, needs seat or chair too.

Pews and Kneelers

- pews – seats for the assembly
- kneelers – furniture piece so assembly can kneel in adoration and reverence
- during the first 1.5 centuries there was no general seating in the place where the Eucharist was celebrated – the assembly place was open and the congregation stood (or knelt on the floor) and would surge toward the ambo for the homily or to greet the bread and wine, etc. IT WAS AN ACTIVE PLACE.
- Middle Ages – benches or pews were introduced to bring "order" to the assembly – this curbed the activity that was going on and brought a "sit and see" mentality.

Principal Mass Materials

Usually the vessels to be used in the liturgy are placed on a small table in the aisle and are brought to the priest during the Presentation of the Gifts. The **chalice** or cup, which must be made of durable noncorrodible material, is the most important vessel. During Mass, the wine in it will be changed into the sacramental Blood of Christ. Each priest usually had his own chalice. A small flat dish called a **paten** holds the large **host** which the priest uses at Mass. This host is larger than the ones received by the congregation because it is easier to see when it is elevated at the consecration. In a cup-like vessel called the **ciborium** are the quarter-sized hosts for the people's Communion. These wafers are usually made by pouring batter, made with flour and water, onto waffle irons inscribed with liturgical symbols. The thin flat sheets are cut out as hosts.

Cruets filled with water and wine are also brought up at the Presentation of Gifts. The altar is covered with a white linen cloth which drapes down the sides or covers the altar like a tablecloth. At least two beeswax candles burn near the altar during Mass. A crucifix, on the altar, on a stand, or suspended on the wall, reminds us that the Mass reenacts the Paschal Mystery.

A white cloth about nine inches square, the **corporal**, is spread in the center of the altar. The chalice and ciborium are placed on it during Mass. A small bowl and finger towel, which the priest uses to wash his hands, are also on the altar or on a table nearby.

The **Sacramentary** is placed on the altar and contains the prayers the priest says during Mass. The Book of the Gospels, carried in by the lector contains the Gospel reading for the day. The Lectionary, already on the ambo contains the first two reading of the day. Hymnals and missalettes which contain the hymns and Mass prayers are usually provided for the congregation.

Since ancient days, the priest has worn vestments derived from the Romans as the distinguishing garb for Mass. An **alb** is a long loose garment reaching to the floor. The **stole**, the symbol of the priesthood, is draped around his neck. The **chasuble**, which means "little house", is a flowing colored outer garment. Its style and color vary with the seasons.

The priest who presides at the liturgy is the **celebrant**. If more than one priest celebrates, the Mass is **concelebrated** and the priests are **concelebrants**. When the pope presides, it is a **Papal Mass**. These externals help us understand better what the Mass means. They also aid us in greater devotion.

Postures at Mass

**Postures are the communal choreography of the liturgy.
ways of expressing participation.**

Postures developed and changed to needs of the time.

Basic attitudes -

- Standing (praising God)***
- Kneeling (adoring God, penitent before God)***
- Sitting (receptive to God)***
- Genuflection (abbreviated form of kneeling)***

Kneeling (Greek – “to fall down”)

A gesture of adoration and supplication introduced in the Middle Ages.

Developed socially in army and civic ceremony – an imperial court custom honoring king, Pope, bishop.

Given a Christian meaning – to adore, worship, venerate, revere – often associated with a kiss or bow.

Became a form of adoration / honor of the Blessed Sacrament

OT and NT references:

Ps 95:6 fall down in worship Mt 27: 29 on bended knee they mocked him

Dn 6:11 – 12 kneel in prayer Mk 1: 40 leper pleaded on knees

Is 45: 23 every knee bend

Posture eventually required in Mass – at different points in liturgy starting on penitential days, later for the Good Friday service, later at Mass.

Standing

A gesture of respect to a superior or teacher.

Developed socially as a servant stands before a seated master.

Given a Christian meaning – stand on Sunday because of the Lord’s resurrection (the day the Lord raised).

OT and NT biblical references:

Gn 18:22 and 1 Sam 1:26

Mk 11:25 and Mt 6:5

Posture eventually required in Mass – at different points in liturgy.

At Mass, people assume same posture as celebrant, except for blessing when head bowed.

Vatican II norm: stand during the Eucharistic Prayer, except for genuflection at the consecration

Genuflection

Kneeling involves both knees; genuflection involves only one knee.

Developed socially at imperial court:

A court custom that showed a gesture of honoring another.

A kiss or bow of the head could be attached to this gesture

Borrowed, no real Christian meaning.

Added Thoughts

gestures depend on the country, building, and social custom

Candles

Light also plays an important role in religions. Candles are used not for the purposes of illumination, although they may have originated for that reason. Candles symbolize joy and praise of God. They are used in the Catholic Church at all liturgical celebrations, as well as by persons for private devotion. Candles are blessed solemnly on February 2, known as Candlemas Day, and the Paschal Candle is blessed at the Easter vigil. Catholics keep blessed candles in their homes as protection and to be burned in times of need.

This theme is also obvious in the practical and symbolic use of candles. These often took the form of small terracotta oil lamps, plain or decorated with Christian symbols. The first evidence of their use as sacramental comes from the 2nd century, an ancient daily evening prayer service at the twelfth hour (6pm) in homes and house-churches. The ritual is called *Lucernare* (Latin *lux*, "light"). This practice evolved into Vespers, one of the daily Hours. It is also considered the origin of the blessing of the Easter Fire and Easter Paschal Candle.

Christians carried candles in funeral processions from the 3rd century on, burned them at the tombs of martyrs and other dead, and, from the 4th century, before relics and images of saints. When worship assemblies occurred in the catacombs because of persecutions, candles were practical fixtures. Even then, however, they were considered an honor to the dead buried there, especially martyrs.

Candles continued to be a feature of public worship and churches when the church became free under civil law in 313. Only from the 7th century, however, is there evidence of their symbolic use at Mass. By then they were carried in the opening procession and Gospel procession and placed around the altar. In the 11th century they were placed on the altar for the first time. The use and number of candles at Mass were determined by church law only from the 17th century.

The symbolic use of candles at Mass were probably influenced by civil practices. High-ranking officials had the privilege of being accompanied in public by a light-bearer. This practice seemed to have been transferred to high-ranking church people, especially bishops, once Christianity obtained a privileged position in the Roman Empire. It was only natural that lights or candles eventually honor the presence of the most important person present, Christ himself symbolized by the altar. The candle that is kept burning before the presence of Christ in the revered Eucharist, popularly called the tabernacle light, or sanctuary light, reflects the meaning. This tradition began in England in the 13th century and was made obligatory everywhere in the 17th.

Holy Water

Another popular sacramental and religious tradition is the use of holy water. It is used to bless oneself, others, and things. "Taking holy water" before entering church is a way of remembering one's baptism with a hint of purifying oneself before approaching the presence of God. For this reason, one tradition is to have the baptismal font or pool close to the entrance of the church. A water ritual of submersion was common in pagan and Jewish religions as an external sign of internal purification. It crossed over into Christianity from Judaism. During the first centuries, baptismal water was not blessed. Over a period of time, however, an elaborate Easter Vigil ritual was used to bless this water, called Easter water. To this day, parishioners take some of this Easter water home to use as a sacramental. Ordinary holy water is blessed by a special ritual including exorcisms and blessed salt.

A "Rite of Sprinkling" may take the place of the Penitential Rite at Mass. This ritual takes the place of the *Asperges* which was a popular tradition in pre-Vatican II times.

The Sign of the Cross

One of the most familiar and ancient catholic gestures, the sign of the cross, in a concise way, expresses the basic truths of the faith: the Trinity, and the redemption by Jesus on the cross, by the words, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

The most common way to make the sign of the cross is by touching the forehead, the chest, and the left and right shoulders with the fingertips of the open right hand. A priest blesses by tracing the cross in the air with his palm outstretched or while holding a crucifix. He may trace a cross with his thumb on the object he blesses.

Liturgical Art

Purpose of Liturgical Art –	the disclosure of the ultimate; of holiness To be a reminder of God’s faithfulness and activity To reveal who God is								
Goal of Liturgical Art -	Intended to lift up the human spirit (emotion, intellect, will) to an encounter with the Holy Spirit. Purpose is not to decorate.								
Requirement of Art-	Must be of artistic merit and authenticity worthy of worship. Must be of a quality, appropriateness, and beauty able to bare the weight of mystery, awe, reverence, and wonder. Able to serve, not interrupt, the liturgy / worship. Able to shape the imagination and lead to an encounter of the divine, allowing one to experience the art and much more beyond it.								
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- tabernacle hangings, vestments – also burial shrouds.

Tabernacle

- place of reservation for the Eucharist – so that the holy Eucharist may be taken to those who are ill at any time.
- Ornamented, solid and unbreakable.
- is usually lit near the tabernacle as a mark of reverence and to indicate the Eucharist is present.

Lamp

Presider's Chair

place of leadership for the celebration of the assembly and directing prayer.