

*Diocese of Covington*  
*RCIA Policies and Guidelines Manual*  
**Timing of the RCIA Process**

**III. Timing of the RCIA Process**

The RCIA is not simply a program of preparation and study, but a process of conversion of heart and mind; therefore, there is no set time frame for an individual to make this spiritual journey. According to the Church, “The rite of initiation is suited to a spiritual journey of adults that varies according to the many forms of God’s grace, the free cooperation of the individuals, the action of the Church, and the circumstances of time and place.” (RCIA Introduction, no. 5)

**A. Precatechumenate**

1. “The whole period of the precatechumenate is set aside . . . so that the genuine will to follow Christ and seek baptism may mature. During this period, priests and deacons, catechists and other laypersons are to give the candidates a suitable explanation of the Gospel (see no. 42). The candidates are to receive help and attention so that with a purified and clearer intention they may cooperate with God’s grace. Opportunities should be provided for them to meet families and other groups of Christians.” (RCIA no. 37-38)
2. The precatechumenate should be an ongoing, year-round process such that whatever time of the year a person inquires about the Church, the period of inquiry may begin for that individual. Inquirers should not be ‘put on the back burner’ until ‘the program begins’ at another time of year. As a Church, we want to welcome any individual who makes an inquiry and immediately begin introducing them to Christ.
3. Precatechumenate activities do not need to be limited to formal teaching sessions and do not need to be weekly. These could be as simple as a personal invitation to participate in a parish devotion, liturgical celebration or even a parish social event (opportunities “to meet families and other groups of Christians”). They could be one-on-one “sessions” to answer simple questions about Christ, about the Church or about other aspects of the faith (e.g., a suitable explanation of the Gospel as mentioned in III.A.1 above).
4. See section VII of this manual which addresses the period of precatechumenate in more detail.

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5. The rite of acceptance should be celebrated at various times of the year as inquirers, through a process of co-discernment with the pastor and RCIA leader, are ready to continue to the catechumenate period. “It should not be too early, but should be delayed until the candidates, according to their own dispositions and situation, have had sufficient time to conceive an initial faith and to show the first signs of conversion.” (RCIA no. 18.1, see also nos. 18.2, 18.3)
6. See section VIII of this manual for more detailed information on the discernment process for the rite of acceptance.

**B. Catechumenate**

1. “The duration of the catechumenate will depend on the grace of God and on various circumstances, such as the program of instruction for the catechumenate, the number of catechists, deacons, and priests, the cooperation of the individual catechumens, the means necessary for them to come to the site of the catechumenate and spend time there, the help of the local community. Nothing, therefore, can be settled a priori. The time spent in the catechumenate should be long enough – several years if necessary – for the conversion and faith of the catechumens to become strong.” (RCIA, no. 76)
2. The catechumenate should be an ongoing, year-round process, such that at whatever time an inquirer is ready to celebrate the rite of acceptance and enter the catechumenate period, they may begin participating in the catechumenate immediately.
3. Although there may need to be a set ‘schedule’ for formal catechetical sessions, which most parishes hold during the traditional school year months, Sunday dismissals for reflecting on the Word and other less formal sessions can be scheduled throughout the year. Although it would be optimal to offer these opportunities weekly all year long, they should at a minimum be offered once a month.
4. The sessions outside the ‘formal catechesis schedule’ will be useful for catechumens who are not yet prepared for the upcoming Easter Vigil, either because they joined the process more recently and need additional time for their conversion, or for those who are as yet unable to approach the Sacraments due to an impediment.

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5. See section IX of this manual which addresses the period of the catechumenate in more detail.

**C. Purification and Enlightenment**

1. This period is well-defined by the ritual book. “The period of purification and enlightenment, which the rite of election begins, customarily coincides with Lent. . . This is a period of more intense spiritual preparation, consisting more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction. . .” (RCIA, nos.138, 139)
2. A process of co-discernment should take place involving the RCIA leader, the pastor, the sponsor and the catechumen to determine readiness for the Sacraments of Initiation. A catechumen should not be sent to the bishop for election, and therefore would not enter the period of purification and enlightenment, if he or she is not ready to receive the Sacraments at the upcoming Easter Vigil.
3. See section X of this manual for more detailed information on the discernment process for the rite of election.
4. See section XI of this manual which addresses the period of purification and enlightenment in more detail.

**D. Mystagogy**

1. The primary timeframe for the mystagogy, or postbaptismal catechesis, is the Easter season, “. . . its main setting is the so-called Masses for neophytes, that is, the Sunday Masses of the Easter season.” (RCIA, no. 247) Formal, scheduled sessions or activities should take place throughout the Easter season to assist the neophytes in embracing their new faith and the sacramental life of the Church.
2. “To close the period of postbaptismal catechesis, some sort of celebration should be held at the end of the Easter season near Pentecost Sunday” (RCIA, no. 249). Following Pentecost, additional activities and/or catechesis could be offered.
3. If possible someone (pastor, RCIA leader, or team member) should follow up with the neophytes throughout the neophyte year to ensure their continued participation in the Sacraments. “On the anniversary of their baptism the neophytes should be brought together in order to give thanks to God, to share with one another their spiritual experiences, and to renew their commitment.” (RCIA, no. 250)

