

THE R.C.I.A. PROGRAM GUIDES THE PARTICIPANT  
THROUGH FOUR PERIODS OR STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT.

### **The First Stage: Pre-Catechumenate (or Inquiry Period)**

*Catecheis: from the Greek "Katekthesis," meaning "instruction by word of mouth."*

This stage allows those interested in becoming members of the Catholic Church a time to learn about the Our Lord, His Church, the parish community, and attend mass and parish functions in order to find out more about the Catholic Faith and experience out local community of St. Joseph the Worker. During this period, participants are referred to as Inquirers. This stage concludes with the Rite of Welcome and Acceptance.

### **The Second Stage - Catechumenate**

This stage is a time of learning more in depth about what the Church teaches through exploration of Scripture, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Church doctrine is presented and discussed at weekly catechetical sessions, and faith sharing continues.

There are three groupings of participants in the Catechumenate stage:

1. *Those who have not been baptized in a Christian faith tradition and are entering the Catechumenate stage are referred to as "**Catechumens.**"*
2. *Those who have been baptized and are entering the Catechumenate are referred to as "**Candidates.**"*
3. *Those who have a Catholic baptism, but little or no religious education, are also a welcome part of our program. By virtue of their Catholic baptism, they are considered Catholics and are referred to as such.*

The Catechumenate stage is concluded with the Rite of Election for the Catechumens. At this time, the Catechumen or Candidate is called forward to continue the journey toward full communion with the Catholic Church. Catechumens who complete the Rite of Election are then referred to as the **Elect**. Candidates continue to be referred to as **Candidates**. Those with Catholic baptism do not participate in the Rite of Election, as they are already members of the Catholic Church.

### **Third Stage: Purification and Enlightenment**

This is a time for prayer, reflection and deeper discernment as to whether God is calling them to full communion with the Catholic Church. This stage happens each year, coinciding with the 40 days of Lent, which is a time of prayer, reflection and discernment for the Church worldwide.

Participants will go deeper into discernment during this stage of Purification and Enlightenment, and will prepare for reception into the Church.

When a member of the Elect has discerned to continue on the faith journey as a Catholic Christian, this stage is concluded at the Easter Vigil mass, where they will receive the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist). Once these Sacraments are received, the Catechumen is a full member of the Roman Catholic Church.

When a Candidate has discerned to continue on the faith journey as a Catholic Christian, they will go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) and will receive the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil. As with the Catechumen, once these sacraments are received, the Candidate is no longer a Candidate, but a full member of the Church.

Catechumens and Candidates who have entered into full communion with the Church are referred to as Neophytes and move on to the fourth stage.

After appropriate catechesis, those already having Catholic baptism will go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) and will receive Confirmation at a special "Confirmation Mass" on the Solemnity of Pentecost at the Cathedral of St. Catharine of Siena in Allentown.

### **Fourth Stage -Mystagogy**

(A period of prayer and post-baptismal catechesis)

This is a time in which the Neophytes pray and reflect on the mysteries of the Faith and the sacraments, and continue to explore their faith journey. We will gather together a few times during this stage to share our experiences of the Easter Vigil, and conclude with mass.