

Glossary



Every area of life has its jargon and technical words and the Catholic Church is no different. The process by which adults become members of the Church – the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (often referred to by its abbreviation RCIA) – uses a number of terms which are either particular to the process or have their special meaning in the Rite.

The following cannot be comprehensive and it is intended for those who have little or no knowledge of the subject. Those who are more familiar will recognise that some terms may have been given a straight forward definition rather than try to capture all the nuances of the word.

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Adult

In the title Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults the Church regards anyone over 14 as an adult. If someone of 14 sought to be baptised they would generally be prepared with their peers in a similar way to children between the ages of 7–14.

Baptised

Someone who has received baptism. As a collective term it can refer to members of the Church – all the baptised.

Baptism (Christening)

The name derives from the Greek – to be immersed. Baptism is the first of the [Sacraments of Initiation](#) through which someone becomes a member of the Church. It is administered by the pouring (or immersing in) water in the name of the Holy Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In this glossary it has sometimes used as a synonym for the Sacraments of Initiation. For example, when an adult receives Baptism at [Easter](#) they will receive all the Sacraments of Initiation of Baptism – Confirmation – Eucharist.

Bible

Sometimes referred to as Scripture (writings). A collection of different books. The Old Testament is the story of God's covenant with the Jewish people. The New Testament the story of Jesus as the fulfilment of the covenant. Catholics believe the Bible to be the inspired word of God.

Bishop

A member of the clergy who is called to have oversight of a region (a diocese). The Bishop will lead the [Rite of Election](#) at the Cathedral (the principal Church of the Diocese).

Candidate

In the RCIA a Candidate is someone who has already been baptised in another Christian denomination but seeks to be a member of the Catholic Church. (This is in contrast to a [Catechumen](#) who is unbaptised.)

Canon Law

This is the Church's legal system which is set out in the Code of Canon Law. It includes the Church's regulations relating to marriage.

Catechesis

The word is based on the Greek meaning 'oral teaching'. Many of the sessions in RCIA will include catechesis. It may have a number of starting points: listening to scripture, looking at Church teaching, reflection on images, the experience of prayer and liturgy, people's questions and life experience.

Catechism

A comprehensive explanation of the teaching of the Church which is presented in a systematic and ordered way.

The Church has an official Catechism and 2 texts which are derived from it:

- [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#)
- [Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church](#)
- [YouCat – Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church](#)

Each is in 4 parts:

1. What we Believe – an exploration of the Creed
2. How we Celebrate – Looking at the Mass and the other Sacraments
3. How we are to Live – Looking at the 10 Commandments and the command to love
4. How we should Pray – looking at the Our Father

The structure of the Catechism is a reminder that faith is not just a body of knowledge but about how we live, pray and celebrate.

Catechumen

This shares the same root as Catechesis – someone who receives 'oral teaching'. In the RCIA first of all refers to someone who has not been baptised. In particular it denotes someone who reached a stage in their journey of faith – they have expressed a formal desire to learn about what it means to follow Christ. See [Shape - Stage 2](#).

Catechumenate

The period of time while someone is a Catechumen. It is the time when a Catechumen enters more deeply into prayer and liturgy, gets to know the parish community, explores the faith of the Church and sees that faith in action through how they live their lives. At the end of this period the Catechumen and the team recognise through [discernment](#) that they are ready for baptism.

The period has no fixed time limit.

Catholic/Christian

A Christian is a follower of Christ. The Catholic Church recognises that through Baptism people become members of Body of Christ. However the Catholic Church places importance on the structure and unity of the Church (local Bishops in

communion with the Pope), the Sacraments, Tradition (the teachings which have been passed down through the ages from the apostles to today)

Church

The word has different levels of meaning. It can refer to the church building where the local community comes together to pray, the local community may also be referred to as the local Church. It can also refer to those who are members of the Church throughout the world and finally it can refer to the institution of the Church, its structure and governance.

Clergy

Men who respond to the call of God in their lives to serve the Church through ordained ministry. There are 3 levels of ordained ministry: deacon, priest and bishop.

Confirmation

Part of the [Sacraments of Initiation](#). Following Baptism Confirmation is a sealing with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

For those who are not baptised all 3 Sacraments are celebrated at the [Easter Vigil](#): Baptism – Confirmation – Eucharist.

For those who have been baptised Confirmation will be celebrated as part of their Reception into Full Communion with the Church.

Communion

has two related meanings:

The communion of the Church is the fellowship and unity shared by members of the Body of Christ which desires to reflect the communion/relationship of the Holy Trinity.

Holy Communion can be another name for the Mass but in particular the sharing of Christ's Body and Blood under the form of Bread and Wine at the end of the celebration. The reception of Holy Communion is reserved for those who are members of the Catholic Church – those who share in the full communion of the Church. It is, therefore, the third of the [Sacraments of Initiation](#) and the climax of the [Easter Vigil](#)

Deacon

Is the first level of ordained ministry in the Church. The ministry of the Deacon is one of service and charity serving God's word and the community. In some parishes there will be a Deacon who is a married man – this is known as a permanent deacon as he will remain as a Deacon rather than eventually become a Priest.

Deanery

A grouping of parishes in a local area or town. A diocese will consist of a number of deaneries made up of parishes. In some areas the RCIA will be offered by parishes together in a deanery.

Diocese

A geographical area of the Church overseen by a Bishop and made up of a number of parishes. In England and Wales there are 22 dioceses.

Discernment

A time of reflection to see if one is ready for the next stage. The reflection is shared by the individual with (members of) the parish team. In the RCIA there are two specific times of discernment: before becoming a Catechumen and before the Rite of Election and Baptism at Easter.

Doctrine

The teaching of the Church – expressed and summarised in the Catechism.

Easter

The Church's annual celebration of the saving death and resurrection of Jesus. Through the liturgies of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Day the Church reflects on these events which are central to the Christian Faith.

Easter Vigil

The heart of the Church's celebration of Easter and, indeed, the heart of each year. A vigil is celebrated in the night before a particular day (in this case Easter Sunday) and derives from the Latin for 'waiting' – being vigilant. It is the primary time when the Church celebrates the [Sacraments of Initiation](#) making the connect between Christ bringing new life through his resurrection and the new life which signalled by baptism.

Elect

Those who have gone forward at the Rite of Election and, following discernment, are recognised as ready for Baptism.

Election, Rite of

The Rite is celebrated at beginning of Lent which occurs 6 weeks before Easter. It celebrated at the Cathedral (the main Church of a diocese) in the presence of the Bishop. At the Rite the Elect are recognised as ready for Baptism which they will receive at Easter.

Enquirer

Someone beginning their journey of faith towards Baptism and membership of the Catholic Church. This initial stage is a time for asking questions, for making enquiries.

Eucharist

The origins of the word are Greek meaning 'to give thanks'. It is a name used for the Mass and it emphasises that the celebration is one where we give thanks to God for what he has done for us. It can refer to Holy Communion –it is both part of what we give thanks for but also the fruit of that giving thanks.

Evangelisation

The sharing of the Good News of Jesus.

Faith

Is used to mean both the process of believing and the set of beliefs. It is both knowledge and trust.

Full Communion

When someone who has been baptised in another Christian denomination and wishes to become a member of the Catholic Church this is described as being received into Full Communion with the Catholic Church. Through baptism a degree of communion is shared. Through assenting what the Catholic Church believes and receiving the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist a person becomes fully in communion with the Church.

Godparent/Sponsor

The role is one of support and witness. A witness of faith to the catechumen and also a witness for the catechumen for others.

The RCIA distinguishes between:

- the Sponsor who accompanies the enquirer from the early stages and through the Catechumenate
- the Godparent who accompanies the Catechumenate as a witness at the Rite of Election and then through the [Sacraments of Initiation](#) and afterwards.

Often one person will carry out both stages of the role.

Gospel

The origins of the word mean 'Good News'. In the Bible there are 4 Gospels which are accounts of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. For more information see [Scripture page](#).

Initiation

The process and ritual by which people become new members of a group.

Lay

Members of the Church who are not ordained (deacons, priests and bishops) who are called to live out their Baptism in their daily lives in the world.

Lectio divina

'Holy reading' – the prayerful reading of scripture to gain insight and guidance from a text.

Lectionary

In the Mass and other liturgies there are always readings from the Bible. These readings are given in a Lectionary which provides a selection of texts and appoints them to particular days. For example at Christmas the readings will be chosen to narrate the birth of Jesus from the Gospels and also the prophecies of his birth in the Old Testament.

Liturgy

The worship of the Church in which praise and thanksgiving is offered to God and from which the participant's receive God's grace.

Local Church

See [Church](#)

Mass

The primary liturgical celebration of the Church. In the Mass Catholics listen to God's Word in the scriptures, give God thanks and receive Holy Communion so that they can be strengthened to live as Christ in the coming week.

Minister

Minister is taken from the Latin word to serve. In the Catholic Church there are ordained ministers who have responded to God's call and have dedicated their lives to the service of God and the Church. Ordained ministers are: deacons, priests and bishops.

Those who are not ordained can still serve the Church through a particular ministry such as Catechesis or Reader or Musician.

Parish

The geographical area of the local Church. This may be a town or in larger towns and cities there may be a number of parishes. In some parts of the country parishes will come together to form a Pastoral Area.

Parish Church

The life of the Parish will usually be centred on the Parish Church where Mass and other Sacraments are celebrated but members of the parish will also contribute to the life of the local community.

Parish Priest

Most parishes these days only have one priest – who is the parish priest. Where there is more than one there will be one who has responsibility to the bishop for the welfare of the parish.

Parish Team

The Parish Priest may have others who work with him both ordained (a Deacon) and lay (e.g. Catechist).

In the RCIA it is usual that there will be a team who work together to lead the process.

Prayer

is turning the heart towards God. It is a relationship with God. See [Prayer page](#)

Precatechumenate

In the RCIA a name for the initial period – before the Catechumenate. See [Shape - Stage 1](#)

RCIA

The abbreviation for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. See [What is RCIA](#) for a fuller description.

Reconciliation

In our lives we do not always live up to the standards that God hopes for us. We do wrong, we commit sins. In these thoughts, words and deeds we separate ourselves from God's love. In Reconciliation (or Confession or Penance) we recognise what we have done wrong and seek forgiveness – to be reconciled with God and the Church.

Rite

In the context of RCIA it is synonymous with 'Liturgy' – a ritual celebration laid down by the Church.

Sacrament

Are visible signs, instituted by Christ, of an invisible reality. For example, in Baptism part of the visible signs is the pouring of water which effects the invisible reality of becoming a member of the Church.

Sacraments of Initiation

Three Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist which together mark a person becoming a member of the Church.

Saint

A man or woman whom the Church recognises as living lives which give witness to Christ. It understands that they are with God in heaven.

Scripture

see [Bible](#)

Sponsor

See [Godparent/Sponsor](#)

Unbaptised

Some who has not received the Sacrament of Baptism.

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