

RCIA Guidebook

2023-2024

*St. Veronica Catholic Church
Chantilly, Virginia*

About RCIA

Introduction

On [Saul's] journey, as he was nearing Damascus, a light from the sky suddenly flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" He said, "Who are you, sir?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do...." Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing....

There was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias, and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias...ask at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul.... Go, for this man is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before Gentiles, kings, and Israelites, and I will show him what he will have to suffer for my name." So Ananias went and entered the house; laying his hands on him, he said, "Saul, my brother, the Lord has sent me...that you may regain your sight and be filled with the holy Spirit." Immediately things like scales fell from his eyes.... He got up and was baptized....

— THE BIBLE, ACTS 9:3-18 (NABRE¹; EXCERPTED)

Sometimes the conversion to Christianity, or to the Catholic Church, is as dramatic as the conversion of Saul, who is now more commonly known as Saint Paul. But more common is a gradual conversion—a process of coming to understand and love Jesus Christ and His Church. Eventually, though, the person who is moving toward Christ and His Church must decide: Do I believe, and will I follow Christ as a member of the Catholic Church?

This process is reflected in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, or RCIA.² It provides for a time of learning and formation in the ways of the Catholic faith. A key part of this process is a series of weekly classes that are designed to give you the information you need to make an informed choice. If you do decide to enter the

¹ *New American Bible Revised Edition* (Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, 2010).

² In Latin, the language of the church, this is "Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum." It was translated into English as "Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults" (RCIA), but the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has approved a new translation that will render it as "Order of Christian Initiation of Adults" (OCIA). Some parishes have already adopted the new English name.

church, this knowledge will be an important part of your Catholic life going forward. The RCIA process also includes special liturgical rites for those preparing to enter the church.

At Saint Veronica's, the RCIA program begins in mid-September of each year and continues until several weeks after Easter in the spring. The classes are held at the church in room P-206 from 7:30 to 9:00 p.m. on Monday evenings. They will present over several months a "catechesis," or systematic view of the teachings, customs, and spiritual life of the Catholic Church, and provide an opportunity for asking any questions you have about Catholic faith and practice.

The highlight of the process is Easter weekend. On Saturday evening, the Easter Vigil Mass will be held. It is sometimes called the "Mother of All Vigils." There, before God and the people of Saint Veronica's, those who choose to enter the church will receive the Sacraments of Initiation and become Catholic Christians.

Who is Eligible?

RCIA classes are open to anybody who wishes to learn about the Catholic faith, regardless of whether they intend to enter the church at the Easter Vigil. **Coming to classes is not a commitment to enter the church!**

There are several categories of RCIA participants:

- **Observers:** Those who want to learn but do not intend to receive Sacraments. This includes curious non-Catholics, and Catholics who are seeking a 'refresher course' in the faith.
- **Inquirers:** Those who want to learn about the Catholic Church and are seriously considering entering the church, but have not yet decided to do so.
- **Catechumens:** Unbaptized persons (i.e., non-Christians) who wish to receive the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation in the Catholic Church.
- **Candidates:** Baptized non-Catholic Christians who wish to enter full communion with the Catholic Church and receive the Sacrament of Confirmation..³
- **Catholics:** Baptized Catholics who have not yet received the Sacrament of Confirmation and are seeking in-depth instruction in the faith before being Confirmed..⁴

Registration

Please fill out the RCIA Registration Form completely and turn it in (either electronically or as a hard copy) at your earliest convenience. If you are an observer and do not intend to receive the Sacraments, you need only provide your contact information.

For those who intend to receive the Sacraments, or who are seriously considering it, you will need to provide some details about your Sacramental history, including information about Baptism and marriages. Additional

³ Baptisms in most Christian traditions are considered valid by the Catholic Church. Notable exceptions include the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, and groups that perform non-trinitarian baptisms.

⁴ Unconfirmed Catholic adults may instead participate in a shorter preparation program in the spring. Contact the parish office for more information. Please speak to Father Kleinmann or Father Moschetto if you are unsure which approach will be best for you.

supporting documents may be required (described later in this document). This is to help us identify any possible impediments to entering the church so they can be reviewed and addressed privately.

Registrations will be accepted through the fifth scheduled session. After that session, late registrations will be considered on a case-by-case basis, contingent on approval by Father Kleinmann.⁵

There is absolutely no fee or charge for the RCIA or the Sacraments.

Texts

Our RCIA “textbooks” are provided free of charge to anybody who wishes to participate in the class, and they are yours to keep even if you do not decide to enter the church. These texts are:

- *The Holy Bible*
- *The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*
- *The Faith Explained* by Leo Trese
- *Outlines of the Catholic Faith*

Most of these are also available as e-books. The Bible and the Catechism are available in online editions for free from the USCCB.⁶

If you choose to purchase your own study Bible, please make sure that it is an approved Catholic translation that includes the Deuterocanonical books: Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, and Baruch.⁷

Schedule and Attendance

A schedule of RCIA classes is provided, and attendance will be recorded for each class. Participants in RCIA who intend to receive the Sacraments should attend as many sessions as they can.

Occasional absences due to travel, illness, and other needs are not held against you. If you work in a job with unusual hours, or if you have family or child-care concerns that will make attendance difficult, please speak with Scott or Melissa about it. We can work with you and the parish staff to make alternative arrangements.

When you miss a class, please do the readings indicated in the schedule. Additionally, we will make audio recordings of the classes available so participants can listen to those they miss.

⁵ Acceptance of registrations later in the program will depend on individual circumstances. Do not hesitate to inquire.

⁶ NABRE Bible: <https://www.usccb.org/offices/new-american-bible/books-bible>
Catechism of the Catholic Church: <https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/catechism/>

⁷ Approved translations most commonly used in the United States are the *New American Bible Second Edition* (NABRE), the *Revised Standard Version – Catholic Edition* (RSV-CE), and the *Douay-Rheims Bible* (DRB). NABRE is the basis of the readings at Mass. The RSV-CE, also known as the *Ignatius Bible*, is used in the English translation of the Catechism. The DRB is an older translation that more literally follows the text of the Latin *Vulgate*, which is the official Bible of the Catholic Church.

We follow parish policy for inclement weather; this means that RCIA classes will generally be canceled if Fairfax County Public Schools have announced a weather closure or have canceled evening activities. In marginal cases where conditions are expected to improve before the evening, we will decide whether to hold class in consultation with the parish office.

An email will be sent out to all registered RCIA participants to announce any class cancellations or other significant changes as early as possible.

Parish Personnel

Pastor:	Father Dennis Kleinmann
Parochial Vicar:	Father Joseph Moschetto
Deacon:	Deacon J. Paul Ochenkowski
RCIA Coordinators:	Scott and Melissa Bradford

You may contact the parish office at **703-773-2000** to speak to Father Kleinmann or Father Moschetto, or to make an appointment to meet with them in person. Scott and Melissa coordinate the program and are available to answer questions at most RCIA classes and via email at rcia@stveronica.net.

Participating in Church Life

Mass and Communion

Participants in the RCIA are encouraged to attend Mass every Sunday, as will be required of them if they choose to enter the Church. They are welcome to attend daily Masses as well. At Mass, they should join the Church in prayer, listen to the Word of God, and offer themselves to Christ in love.

As Catholics, we believe that the Eucharist (Holy Communion) is the true body and blood of Jesus Christ. It is a sign of our unity with him and his church. For this reason, only practicing Catholics who are not conscious of any unconfessed mortal sin and have fasted for at least one hour should come forward to receive Communion. Non-Catholics, and Catholics who are not properly disposed, should remain at their seats. They are invited to pray an *Act of Spiritual Communion* in anticipation of receiving the Eucharist when they are able. This is one such prayer:

My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Holy Sacrament. I love You above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.

— SAINT ALPHONSUS LIGUORI

Eucharistic Adoration

As mentioned above, we believe that the Eucharist is the literal body and blood of Jesus Christ. It still appears as bread and wine, but it has been truly changed.⁸

Thus, the church “has at all times paid this great Sacrament the worship known as ‘latria,’ which may be given to God alone,” and “displays this latria...both during Mass and outside of it, by taking the greatest possible care of consecrated Hosts, by exposing them to the solemn veneration of the faithful, and by carrying them about in processions to the joy of great numbers of the people.”⁹

The Eucharist is exposed for adoration in the main church at Saint Veronica’s each weekday beginning at around 1:00 p.m. and continuing through the night until 8:15 a.m. the next morning (with occasional suspensions for funerals and other church events). You are invited to come to the church during these times to pray in the true presence of Christ.

Other Activities

RCIA participants are also encouraged to take part in other activities and practices of the Church. For example, they should read the Bible regularly, learn Catholic prayers and pray them regularly (especially the Rosary), and participate in parish events. They should begin to adopt Catholic practices like the practice of signing themselves with the Sign of the Cross.

Descriptions of these and other prayers and devotions are described in the *Outlines of the Catholic Faith* booklet, and further details can be found online.

There are many other activities going on at the church each week, which you can find listed on the parish website or in the weekly bulletin. Most church activities are open to anybody who wishes to attend, including RCIA participants, regardless of their sacramental status.

Possible Concerns

Marriage and Divorce

The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life and which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring, has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament between the baptized.

— CODE OF CANON LAW, 1055 §1

One of the most beautiful aspects of the Catholic Church is her unchanging teaching on marriage. Because many governments and religious groups (including many Christian denominations) hold differing views, the

⁸ The theological term for this change is “transubstantiation.”

⁹ *Mysterium Fidei* by Saint Paul VI, #55-56 (excerpt).

marital status of those who seek to enter the Catholic Church can sometimes be an impediment that must be reviewed and addressed.

This is why the RCIA registration form includes questions about any current and past marriages. In some cases, the ability of an RCIA participant to receive the Sacraments or enter the Church may be affected by their marital status. If you are planning to enter the Church, or are seriously considering it, please fill out this information completely so we can identify any potential concerns as early as possible.

The following is some general information about different marital situations that we often see with RCIA participants. Note that this is just a general overview; it is not a substitute for a more detailed review of your individual situation by a priest:

- If you and your spouse are *not* Baptized Catholics, and neither has any previous marriages, then your civil or religious marriage is likely valid. If so, no further action will be needed.¹⁰
- If either you or your spouse are Baptized Catholics but were married in a non-Catholic ceremony without a dispensation, then your marriage will likely need to be convalidated.¹¹
- If either you or your spouse have divorced and remarried, and previous spouse(s) are still living, further investigation may be required. This may include making a petition for annulment.¹²
- If you have divorced but have not remarried, this is likely not an impediment to entering the church, but you may not be free to marry later.

If you need to discuss convalidation or annulment, or if you are unsure about your marital situation and how it might affect your possible entry into the church, please speak to Father Kleinmann or Father Moschetto.

Sinful Lifestyles

People experiencing a conversion to Jesus Christ sometimes find themselves in lifestyles or habits that are opposed to the Catholic Christian life. For example, it is not uncommon for couples to “live together” (cohabitate) as if they were spouses before their marriage.

We are all sinners, but Christ calls us to repent of our sins then “go, and now sin no more.”¹³ It is one thing to recognize our sins and try to overcome them, even as we continue to struggle. It is another to embrace and persist in lifestyles and activities that are objectively wrong.

¹⁰ The ministers of the Sacrament of Matrimony, or of natural marriage, are the spouses themselves. Unless there are impediments like a previous marriage or lack of consent, non-Catholic marriages are generally considered valid in the eyes of the church.

¹¹ Baptized Catholics must be married in the church unless they are given a dispensation. If a Catholic was married outside the church, and there are no other impediments, the marriage can be recognized by the church with a convalidation ceremony.

¹² In the eyes of the church, a civil divorce does not dissolve a marriage. However, the church may investigate a marriage and determine that the necessary conditions for a valid union were not met. In that case, the church may issue a declaration of nullity (annulment), after which the parties would be again free to marry.

¹³ John 8:11; *Douay-Rheims Bible* (English College at Rheims & Douay and Bishop Richard Challoner, 1899 edition).

We encourage participants in RCIA to commit their lives to following Christ and his commandments, and to turn away from sin. Any person engaged in unrepentant mortal sin should not receive the Sacraments or make the profession of faith to enter the Catholic Church.

If this presents serious difficulty, or if you need further counsel, please speak to Father Kleinmann or Father Moschetto to discuss your situation.

Required Documents

All who wish to receive the Sacraments of Initiation and enter the Catholic Church are required to provide certain documentation to the RCIA coordinators. This allows us to address any impediments, and then accurately and completely record your sacramental information.

If you are only observing and do not intend to become a Catholic, the RCIA registration form is the only document we require. However, if you think there is even a chance that you will decide to enter the church, we recommend providing the additional documentation described below so there are no unnecessary delays. *Providing these documents is not a commitment to enter the church!*

Baptismal Certificate

If you are a Baptized non-Catholic Christian, please provide a copy or scan of your Baptismal certificate. This can be a copy of an “original” from when you were Baptized, or it can be a newly issued record from the church or celebrant of your Baptism.

If a certificate or equivalent record cannot be obtained, we can also accept a letter from you (if you were Baptized as an adult) or an adult witness (such as a parent) stating that you have been Baptized and providing the following information as best as can be remembered:

- 1) The date and location of the Baptism.
- 2) The celebrant of the Baptism.
- 3) That the Baptism was with water and followed the trinitarian form.
- 4) Dated signature of the witness.

If you are a Baptized Catholic, please provide a newly issued copy of your complete Baptismal certificate from the church where you were Baptized. You may obtain this by contacting your Baptismal church and requesting that they mail a copy to you.

If the church where you were Baptized no longer exists, you can contact the diocese where it was located. They should be able to provide the record or direct you to the parish where the records have been transferred.

Marriage Certificate

If you are married, and had Catholic ceremony, please provide a marriage certificate from the church where the marriage ceremony was held.

If you are married, and had a civil or non-Catholic religious ceremony, please provide a state-issued marriage certificate or equivalent document.

If you are divorced and remarried, and the church has granted you a declaration of nullity, please also provide a copy of that declaration.

Sponsor or Godparent

All who intend to be Baptized or Confirmed at the Easter Vigil must have a “Sponsor” or “Godparent” (these terms are interchangeable for RCIA purposes) who will stand as a witness to the Sacraments. Ideally, this person also acts as a mentor in the faith during RCIA and beyond.

Canon law requires that a sponsor be a Catholic who has received all the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist), is at least sixteen years old, is not living in contradiction to church teaching, and is not the mother or father of the person they are sponsoring.

An RCIA sponsor form will be sent out roughly half-way through the program. You should ask your chosen sponsor to fill it out and sign it, then turn in an original copy to Scott and Melissa.

If your sponsor is a parishioner at Saint Veronica’s, the sponsor form is all the documentation we will need.

If your sponsor is a parishioner at a different parish, we will also need a letter or form from their parish certifying that they can serve as a sponsor. This is a common piece of documentation; most parish offices should know what they need to provide.

If you do not know anybody who is suitable to serve as a sponsor, please let Scott and Melissa know. Several volunteers have offered to serve as sponsors for those who need them.

If your sponsor is not able to attend the Easter Vigil Mass, a “proxy” can stand in their place. Please let Scott and Melissa know if you expect to need a proxy so we can make the necessary arrangements.

Confirmation Saint Name

It is a Catholic tradition that people are Confirmed in the name of a saint. RCIA participants who intend to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation should send their desired Confirmation Saint Name to Scott and Melissa at least two weeks before the Easter Vigil so we can ensure they are included in the Vigil’s Litany of the Saints.

There are many canonized saints, all of whom are models of the Catholic faith and worthy of emulation. One useful resource for learning about them is the [CatholicSaints.info](https://catholic-saints.info) website. There you can search an extensive database of the saints based on their patronage, state-in-life, occupations, and other attributes. There are countless other resources and books about the saints that you can consult.

One approach for choosing a Confirmation Saint Name is to begin reading about saints who are patrons of topics that you are interested in, or for your occupation, or for your home state or diocese. Before too long, you will likely find yourself coming back to a particular saint for whom you have developed an affinity. It has been said that you do not find a Confirmation Saint, your Confirmation Saint finds you!

If you have difficulty choosing a saint name, please feel free to discuss your search with Father Kleinmann, Father Moschetto, or Scott and Melissa.

RCIA and Liturgy

RCIA is not just a series of classes; it is part of the liturgical life of the church. As Catechumens and Candidates, you will begin to celebrate the seasons, feasts, and solemnities of the Catholic year. There are also several rites and ceremonies that are specific to RCIA.

Lent

Lent is the liturgical season that begins on Ash Wednesday, which is forty days (excluding Sundays) before Easter. This is a penitential season that calls to mind Christ's forty days of temptation in the desert. Catholics are obliged to observe fasts on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, and to abstain from meat on all Fridays during the Lenten season.

For members of the Latin Catholic Church, the norms on fasting are obligatory from age 18 until age 59. When fasting, a person is permitted to eat one full [meatless] meal, as well as two smaller [meatless] meals that together are not equal to a full meal. The norms concerning abstinence from meat [on Fridays] are binding upon members of the Latin Catholic Church from age 14 onwards.

— U.S. CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS.¹⁴

Although these practices are not binding on RCIA participants who have not yet entered the church, you are welcome and encouraged to observe them as part of your preparation.

Rite of Election

A Rite of Election is typically held at the Cathedral of Saint Thomas More in Arlington, Virginia, early in Lent. This liturgy is usually celebrated by Bishop Michael Burbidge. It serves as a kind of formal declaration that, based on what you know so far, you intend to receive the Sacraments of Initiation at Easter.

The Arlington Diocese typically releases a schedule and other details about the Rite of Election in December or January. We will provide further information to RCIA participants after we have received and reviewed those details.

¹⁴ <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year-and-calendar/lent/catholic-information-on-lenten-fast-and-abstinence>

Scrutinies

Three “Scrutinies” will be held at Saint Veronica’s during Lent. Those who intend to receive the Sacraments of Initiation (or who are still seriously considering it) are encouraged to participate in all three. The Scrutinies are brief ceremonies during Sunday Mass where you will receive a blessing from the priest, and the people of the parish will have an opportunity to pray for you.

Our typical schedule of Scrutinies is as follows. Specific dates are provided in the class schedule and will be announced in class.

- **First Scrutiny:** 9:00 a.m. Mass on the Third Sunday of Lent
- **Second Scrutiny:** 10:45 a.m. Mass on the Fourth Sunday of Lent
- **Third Scrutiny:** 9:00 a.m. Mass on the Fifth Sunday of Lent

Holy Week

The Sunday one week before Easter is Palm Sunday, and the beginning of the most solemn and sacred week of the Catholic year: Holy Week. Participants in RCIA are encouraged to take part in the week’s events, which will be announced on the parish website and in the bulletin.

On the Monday of Holy Week, we will have RCIA class at the usual time for a special presentation about the Liturgy of the Easter Vigil. Tentatively, we will also have a special confession time for Baptized non-Catholics to make their first sacramental Confessions.¹⁵

On the afternoon of Holy Saturday, we will meet at the church for a Vigil rehearsal. Those receiving the sacraments and their sponsors are strongly encouraged to attend. This will include arranging reserved seating and instruction in how to receive the Sacraments. Further details will be provided as we approach the end of the Lenten season.

The Easter Vigil

The highlight of the RCIA program is the Easter Vigil Mass on the evening of Holy Saturday.

According to Holy Scripture, Christ was crucified on Friday (the first day), remained dead on Saturday (the second day), and rose on Sunday (the third day). In the Jewish liturgical tradition, each day begins at sundown, so under our calendar system Christ’s resurrection would have occurred at some point between sundown on Saturday evening and early Sunday morning. The Easter Vigil Mass, which must be held after sundown, is the first Easter liturgy each year.

¹⁵ Candidates (those already Baptized) will need to make a sacramental Confession before entering full communion and being Confirmed. We will provide instruction as the time approaches. The special RCIA confession time is provided as a courtesy; candidates may instead use a scheduled confession time at any Catholic church or make a private appointment with a priest. Catechumens (those not yet Baptized) should not make a confession before being Baptized; the Sacrament of Baptism washes away all sin.

It is a special Mass that retells all of salvation history. The church begins in darkness, and as the Mass progresses the church becomes incrementally brighter in anticipation of the paschal celebration. The *Alleluia* is sung for the first time since before Lent began.

The rites of initiation are held after an extended Liturgy of the Word and the homily. Catechumens will be Baptized, then candidates will be welcomed into full communion, and then both groups will be Confirmed. Following this, the Liturgy of the Eucharist will proceed, and the new Catholics will receive their first Holy Communion.

From this night forward, the newly Confirmed assume all the rights and duties of Catholic Christians.

The Mystagogy

RCIA does not end at the Easter Vigil Mass. After a one-week break, we will resume our Monday classes, and they will continue for a few more weeks. This period of RCIA is called the “mystagogy.”¹⁶ All RCIA participants are encouraged to continue attending.

For those who received the Sacraments of Initiation, this is not the end—it is a beginning. There is still more to learn. The mystagogy period is designed to help you deepen your faith and give you helpful guidance as you embark upon your new life as a Catholic Christian.

Conclusion

We hope this guide has helped you to understand the RCIA process at Saint Veronica Catholic Church and helped prepare you to enter a more perfect union with Christ and his church. Please do not hesitate to contact Scott and Melissa Bradford at rcia@stveronica.net, or Father Kleinmann or Father Moschetto at the parish office, 703-773-2000, if you have any questions or concerns.

God bless you, and welcome home!

¹⁶ From a Greek term meaning “to lead through the mysteries.”