

The next step...

Make contact with our R.C.I.A. Coordinator via the Parish office or ask for our Sacraments Minister, Teresa Pirola (9410 9027 W). They will arrange a time to meet with you to learn more about your story, your questions and to discuss the next step. If you are a Catholic who is interested in sponsoring someone in their journey to baptism, your enquiry is welcome! We are always looking for fresh faces to assist with the RCIA Team. If you would like to get involved, please get in touch!

More ways to enquire

What we have described overleaf is the norm for **adult** baptism. We are gradually developing related processes for other age groups and finding personnel to assist with specific cultural groups.

Please enquire at the Parish Office if you have a baptism enquiry for:

- Babies and infants
- Children (aged 5-11)
- Youth
- Cantonese-speaking enquirers
- Japanese-speaking enquirers
- Indonesian-speaking enquirers

We will put you in touch with the appropriate person.

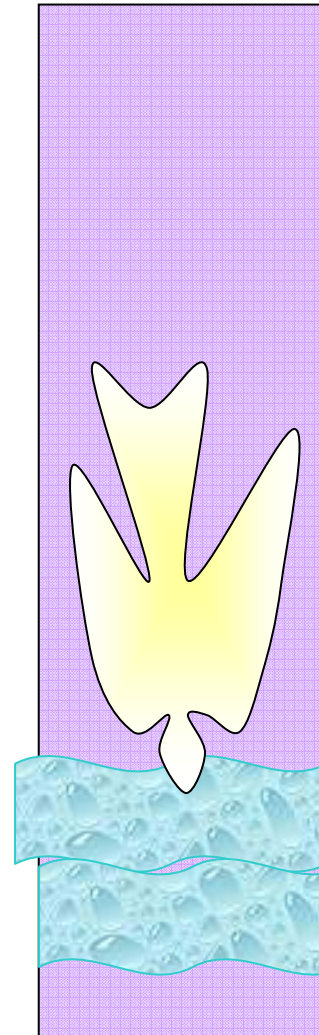


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Further enquiries:
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Adult Baptism

At Our Lady of Dolours, Catholic Parish of Chatswood



'I would like to become a Catholic.'

'I am already baptised in another Christian Church, but I wish to become a Catholic.'

'I am interested in what's involved in becoming a Catholic, but I am not ready to take the step yet.'

Do you have a question like these? Wonderful! We welcome your enquiry and would love to know more about you, your story and the events that have led to this interest in the Catholic Church. This brochure offers some introductory information about the steps involved in becoming a Catholic.

Put simply, the Catholic Church is a world-wide family of believers who follow the ways and teachings of Jesus Christ. Catholics share a distinct way of life characterized by certain beliefs, values and patterns of worship. The Catholic Church is not just a 'what' (a religion) but a 'who' (a people, a community).

Becoming a Catholic is a bit like getting married... it's a life-changing and very serious commitment. It is not simply a 'membership badge', it is a commitment to a community and a way of living. It entails certain obligations. Adult baptism envelops a person in a beautiful and life-giving relationship with God and with a community of faith.

Already a baptised Christian?

The process of initiation described here applies to an unbaptised person. In the case of a person baptised in another Christian denomination, the process is adapted. The Catholic Church recognises their baptism and therefore does not re-baptise. Rather, the person is **received into full communion with the Catholic Church**. This ceremony involves a solemn profession of faith in the presence of the congregation. The new Catholic then receives the sacrament of Confirmation and is welcomed to the table of the Eucharist.

Steps in the initiation process

Becoming a Catholic involves a process of initiation which goes by the name Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (often referred to as "R.C.I.A.").

Typically, this process takes 6-12 months, however it can be shorter or longer depending on a number of factors. God calls each person in a unique way, and we tailor the process as we listen to how God is leading this person.

The RCIA involves four stages of formation. The transition from one stage to another is marked by a public ritual.

Stage 1: Enquiry

The initial stage of the RCIA – the period of ENQUIRY – is a 'getting to know you' stage. As a person expresses interest in the Catholic community, parishioners respond to the enquirer's questions and share something of their own experience of being Catholic. This may occur in a formal way (via enquiry sessions) or informally (through friendships with Catholics).

This period involves no formal commitment. It is a time of initial exploration as the enquirer, with the help of the parish community, decides whether or not to undertake the journey towards baptism in the Catholic Church. If yes, the enquirer enters the next stage: the Catechumenate.

Stage 2: The Catechumenate

During this phase, an unbaptised person becomes more deeply acquainted with the people, teachings and practices of the Catholic Church. He/she is no longer called an *enquirer* but a *catechumen* (from the ancient Greek: one who 'echoes the gospel'). This is the longest period of the initiation process and it involves a weekly commitment to attend Sunday Mass and participate in guided reflections on Scripture and Church teaching. The sessions are currently held on Sundays 4-5pm.

When ready, the catechumen enters the next stage: the Period of Enlightenment. His/her title changes to: *the elect*.

Stage 3: Period of Enlightenment

This stage – the Period of Enlightenment – is a short period of final preparation before baptism. It normally coincides with Lent which is a six week period of repentance and renewal for Catholics and catechumens alike. The weekly reflections continue with heightened focus and a number of small ritual steps take place at this time.

Baptism

All these steps culminate in the celebration of Baptism at Easter. Easter is the Church's greatest event of the year, celebrating Christ's victory over sin and the gift of our new life in the Spirit. Easter is the preferred time for baptisms, however it is possible for an adult to be baptised at other times of the year. After baptism, *the elect* are now called *neophytes* (from the ancient Greek: *new nature*)

Stage 3: Period of Mystagogy

Even after baptism, the newly baptised continue to meet for 4-6 weeks to reflect upon and 'unpack' the experience of their initiation and all that has happened on their journey of conversion. This period is called Mystagogy ('reflection on the mysteries' in Greek) and has a particular focus on the call to mission.

Support along the way

A person who is preparing for baptism is given a **sponsor**, i.e. a parishioner who 'walks with' them on their journey towards baptism. The sponsor is an encourager and guide. As the Baptism draws closer, the catechumen will be asked to nominate a godparent. Friends, relatives, parishioners, catechists and priests also play a support role in this journey of faith. The whole parish community participates through prayer, worship and various rituals along the way. Becoming a Catholic is a communal experience!

The Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist

Baptism is the first step of initiation into the Catholic Church. There are two other sacraments (sacred rituals) which complete initiation and are usually received during the same ceremony as the Baptism. **Confirmation** is a special empowerment by the Holy Spirit. The **Eucharist** is our sacred meal at which we receive the Body and Blood of Christ under the form of bread and wine.

In the weeks following Baptism, we introduce the new Catholics to yet another sacrament called Reconciliation ('Confession'). This is a sacred ritual by which we continually renew our baptismal commitment and experience God's forgiveness.