

THE CATHOLIC PARISH OF KING'S LYNN

The Church of Our Lady of the Annunciation

London Road, King's Lynn, Norfolk. PE30 5HQ.

and

Holy Family Church

Field Lane, Gaywood, King's Lynn, Norfolk. PE30 4AY

Becoming a Catholic



You might be reading this page because you are curious about what is involved in becoming a Catholic, or because you firmly desire to join the Catholic Church. Either way, we wish to assure you that at no stage will the Catholic Church put you under any pressure to sign up and become a full member. In fact, you may find the process of becoming a Catholic somewhat slower than you would like, because membership involves making a firm commitment to God and to the local Catholic community, and is not to be undertaken lightly!

There are two sides to becoming a Catholic – receiving instruction in the faith, and taking part in the services of a local Catholic community. You can start with one or the other, but you will need to have completed sufficient instruction AND be attending regular services before you can become a full member of the Catholic faith.

If you are seriously ill, the usual preparations can be reduced, and if poor health means you are not able to attend church regularly, the local parish can arrange for Holy Communion to be brought to you at home. If you desire to become a full member of the Catholic Faith, please do not let health issues stand in the way – your local parish will find a way to accommodate your circumstances.

If you, or your current partner, have been married before, be aware that this introduces complications which your local priest will need to talk through with you. Jesus Christ taught that God's plan for human sexual relationships was that one man and one woman should commit themselves to each other in a lifelong partnership, and for this reason the Catholic Church does not recognise that civil divorce ends a true marriage. However, the Church has its own rules about when a marriage "counts". These rules are too complex to summarise here, but please assume that it is always worth talking to a priest about your personal circumstances to see what your options are.

If you doubt, for any other reason, that the Catholic Church would welcome you into membership, please "Come and See"! The Catholic faith stands for high standards, but also for second chances. There is no person on earth who would not be welcome as a Catholic, as long as you sincerely aim to follow the teaching of Jesus as the Catholic Church understands it!

Attending a Service

The main Sunday service in a Catholic Church is called Mass, and at Mass we remember the command of Jesus to take bread and wine – "do this in memory of me". The priest repeats the Lord's words, "This is my body, this is my blood" and as Catholics, we believe that the bread and wine truly become the Body and Blood of Jesus. The wafer and the liquid don't change their taste or appearance, but we believe that what they are in God's sight has fundamentally changed. No longer are they truly bread and wine, but rather the Lord's own Body and Blood. For this reason many churches also offer a kind of service called Adoration – the Body of Jesus is placed in a frame on the altar and members of the congregation come for silent prayer.

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament

Guests are welcome to attend Mass, Adoration, and all other services in your local Catholic Church. You might choose to try attending Mass



before introducing yourself to the local priest or community. If so, be aware that there are lots of different styles of Mass – with or without music, using mainly Latin, or mainly English (in Cardiff there are also Masses in Welsh and in British Sign Language); some Masses have special provision for children. Please do not judge the whole Catholic Church on one single experience of attending Mass!

If you do choose to attend a Mass without someone from the local community guiding you, in most parishes there will be some kind of prayer card or book available to help you follow the service and take part in the prayers. There is only one restriction: when Holy Communion is distributed, guests who are not yet members of the Catholic Church are asked to refrain from receiving communion: you may either remain in your place, or join the queue and come forward to receive a blessing, indicating this by folding your arms in the form of an X over your chest.

Catholics in good health are expected to honour the Lord's Day by attending Mass every Sunday, as far as practically possible (a Catholic 'Sunday' includes Saturday evenings). You don't have to attend Mass regularly to join a group exploring what Catholics believe, but if you decide to become a member, you will need to have become used to attending Mass regularly.

Receiving Instruction

Many parishes offer a group where those considering becoming Catholic can gather together to learn more about the Faith. Smaller parishes may offer one-to-one conversations with the parish priest or a trusted instructor ("catechist") from the local congregation. Through these sessions, you will learn about the teaching of Jesus as the Catholic Church has received it: teaching about God and about who human beings are in God's eyes; the moral principles which God asks his followers to live up

to; the ceremonies of the Catholic Church in which we worship God, express sorrow for our deliberate wrongdoing, and seek God's healing in times of sickness; and the different ways of praying which are part of the Catholic tradition. There is quite a bit to consider, so the instruction can take several months, and often a year (sometimes more).

If you have previously been part of a Christian Church, you will probably need less instruction, because you will know the basic message of Jesus already, but a mixed group of enquirers may need to travel at the speed of its least experienced member.

If you have not already been baptised, the normal way of becoming a Catholic is to be baptised on the night before Easter Sunday.

If you **HAVE** been baptised – and the Catholic Church recognises both adults and children, as properly baptised (Christened) if water has been poured on you "baptising you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit", then you will be guided in making a confession to a priest shortly before the day (again, often the night before Easter Sunday) when you will be Confirmed as a Catholic and receive Holy Communion for the first time.

What Do I Do Now?

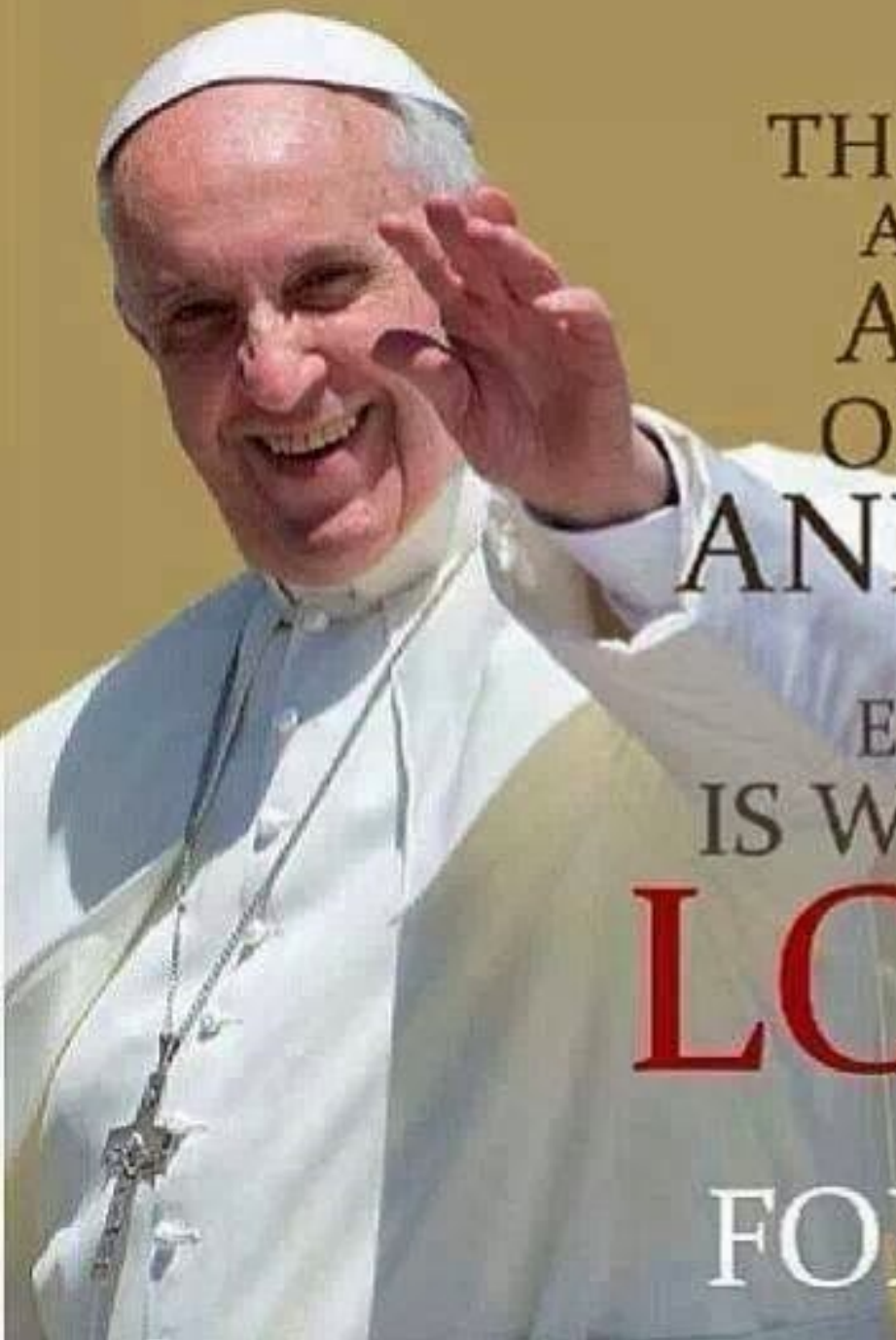
You might want to start by attending a Mass, or by visiting an Instruction Group in the nearby Catholic church.

The Journey Continues...

Everything written above is a basic introduction. As you explore the faith you will discover the Church's teaching is a little more complex – there are circumstances where Christians from other denominations can share Holy Communion; there are certain Holy Days in addition to Sundays when Catholics are expected to attend Mass. But everything written above is good for beginners!

I 
BEING CATHOLIC

BECOMING A CATHOLIC



LET
THE CHURCH
ALWAYS BE
A PLACE
OF MERCY
AND HOPE,
WHERE
EVERYONE
IS WELCOMED,
LOVED
AND
FORGIVEN.

~ Pope Francis

BECOMING A CATHOLIC

Welcome

These pages are intended for people who are interested in becoming Catholic.

You will find:

Pages that will help you explore some first steps
– **Encounters**

Stories are from people who were once in a similar position to you
– **People & Stories**

Pages about how the Church welcomes new members
– **Information**

A glossary and answers to frequently asked
– **Questions**

When you have had a look round you may wonder what **Next Steps** you might take – but before you do, take some first steps, explore, see what you encounter.

Enjoy looking around.

First Encounters

You are interested in the Catholic Church. You may be interested in becoming a Catholic. You may be ready to take a first step. On these pages you will find some ideas that might help you begin.

Different people approach the stirrings of faith, or a new interest, in different ways. Some like to know more about the Church before they make first contact; others will want an idea of what might be involved. It may be that you approached a local church and were informed that the group does not start for a while and would like to do something while you wait.

You may have a friend you can approach or you interested in learning more about Jesus or finding out how Catholics use Scripture (readings from the Bible) to pray. You may like to spend some quiet time in Prayer at home or in your local church. You would be welcome at your local Church on Sunday when Mass is celebrated. Often when we become interested in something we begin to notice references to it in the News—you might like to also find out what the Church is saying about a variety of issues.

Have a look around. Find the next step that suits you. You might like to try more than one...

A Time of Prayer

Saint Thérèse of Liseaux, a saint of the 20th Century described prayer as:

For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.

There are many ways of praying and part of your journey of faith will be to find ways that suit you. Some people like prayer which is laid down with particular texts; others enjoy contemplating an image in silence. Prayer is part of everyday life for Catholics: offering thanks to God in the morning; offering the day to God in the evening. Prayer is not just about oneself — you can pray for other people either specific intentions for their needs or just asking God to care for them.

- Find a quiet time or place
- Light a candle
- Just sit peacefully, aware of yourself
- Ask for peace, whatever you need
- Give thanks for the good things in your life
- Think of your family and friends, place them in God's tender care

Contemplating Nature

For many people it is in nature that they encounter God. It is that sense of awe or transcendence which can be found in a sunset, a beautiful view or a rainbow. A sense of something beyond and greater than the material reality that we experience. It can be in the stillness of being 'away from it all' or in attentiveness to the beauty of a flower.

In the Psalms, the songs of the Bible, the writer exclaims:

*You care for the earth, give it water,
you fill it with riches.*

You crown the year with your goodness.

*Abundance flows in your steps,
in the pastures of the wilderness it flows.*

*The hills are girded with joy,
the meadows covered with flocks,
the valleys are decked with wheat.
They shout for you, yes, they sing.*

Going to Mass

The Mass is the central act of worship for Catholics. At Mass the local Catholic community gathers and unites in prayer with the Church throughout the world. It is nourished by listening

to readings from the Bible and by the Body and Blood of Christ present in bread and wine. From this celebration the community is sent to live their lives renewed and seeking to follow Christ more closely in their daily lives.

- The local church community gathering for Mass will give you a good picture of what it means to be a Catholic — in a whole variety of ways.
- Sunday morning is when most people come to church.
- Most churches still get quite full on Sundays — so you can get lost in the crowd.
- Many churches will also have weekday Mass which is usually shorter, quieter and with fewer people there.
- There should be a noticeboard outside the church giving Mass times. Many parishes also have websites.
- *Mass can be quite daunting when you are unused to what is going on.*
- *If you have a friend who is a Catholic you could ask them to take you.*
- *You may be given a variety of books and pieces of paper to deal with — don't worry. If you feel able to, ask the person next to you for help.*
- *There will be prayers and texts to say and sing — join in as much as you are comfortable.*
- *People will change posture: standing, sitting and kneeling. Be aware of what's happening.*
- *Only Catholics can receive Communion. Don't worry if people need to pass you to get to the Communion.*
- See what phrases or images strike you at Mass. Remember them afterwards.

In the News

To be a Catholic is not just about going to Church it is about trying to live a good life – following the example of Jesus. The Church has something to say about many of the issues affecting our society and our world. Learn more about what Catholics think and what they are engaged in from the following websites:

Catholic News — Press releases and news items from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

Choosing the Common Good — The statement by the bishops before elections covering matters which affect the whole of society.

CAFOD — works on behalf of the Church in England and Wales in International Development

Live Simply — is about the call to live simply, sustainably and in solidarity with others.

Catholic Social Teaching — The Church has a long tradition of thinking how to build a just world.

Thinking Faith — has articles reflecting on not just Church issues but items in the news, books and films.

INTRODUCING JESUS

Who do they say that I am?

A Friend

To those in need

A loving Father

A brother, sister, neighbour

A Comforter

To those who ask

A healer to the sick

A helper of the poor and the marginalised

A Teacher

By example

Through the good news of the gospel

The Good Shepherd

The One who loves us so much that He died in order that we may live

The Son of God

This is my beloved Son

You might also...

You might wish to find out more about Jesus by reading one of the Gospels — accounts of his life. Go the reading Scripture page for ideas and resources.

If you prefer images to words you might enjoy looking at some images of Jesus from across the centuries.

Listening to Music

Over the centuries the Church has been a great patron of religious music. Texts from the Bible and the worship of the Church have inspired composers to write masterpieces in praise of God. Many people, whether they are religious or not, will have recordings of Masses and Requiems or the singing of Gregorian Chant. It is music which people find beautiful, which can inspire them or help them relax.

Take time to listen to some Christian sacred music. As you listen what image of God does the music paint in your mind? If you have them available look at the words, and if needed a translation. How does the music express the words? If you have a favourite piece of sacred music, look at the words and see what they mean for you.

You might also...

like to spend some time looking at Art

Looking at Art

Many of our towns and cities have Art Galleries which have examples of religious art. Indeed many of the paintings will have originally been commissioned by the Church and designed to be displayed in churches. Find a piece of religious art which appeals to you.

- Does it depict a story from the Bible or a Saint?
- Is there information about the story available?
- What is the general mood of the picture?
- Choose a figure in the painting. What attracts you to them? What qualities does the person have?

If you are unable to get to a gallery have a look at the Your Paintings website and search for 'Jesus.

You might also...

like to know more about Jesus

Reading Scripture

Whenever Catholics gather together for a service in Church there are readings from Scripture — the Bible. It is a source of teaching, comfort and inspiration. Above all it is a story; in particular the story of Jesus.

The following are all sayings of Jesus.

What are you seeking?

I am with you always

Peace be with you.

Do not be afraid.

Come to me all you who labour and are heavy burdened and I will give you rest

Love one another as I have loved you.

Reading the story of Jesus

You might wish to find out more about Jesus by reading one of the Gospels — accounts of his life. The Gospel of St Mark is the shortest and is generally thought to be the first written. The Gospels of St Matthew and St Luke contain some of the most familiar stories both about Jesus and also told by him. The Gospel of St John is the most poetic of the four.

You might also...

like to use one of these phrases as a reflection in Prayer.

Talking to a Friend

Do you know anyone (friend, neighbour, colleague) who goes to church? Who engages with their faith and finds it gives meaning to their life?

You might

- Ask them what their faith means to them?
- Comment on, or ask about something you have noticed (eg wearing a crucifix — why do they wear it?)
- Ask if you could go to church with them.
- Ask if they could show you round their church.

Don't be surprised if your friend is unable to answer all your questions. They may even have a few questions of their own!

You might also...

go with them to Mass.

Visiting a Church

Do you know where your local Catholic Church is? If not they are usually listed in the local phone directory. If you know the name try search for it on the internet. Most churches are open at weekends – some are able to be open on weekdays.

Your local church will be open for Mass at times which are displayed on a noticeboard. At other times it can be open to provide a space for prayer.

Do you like the look of this church?

You might like to drop in – have a look round – get a feel for it.

Sit down. Where are your eyes drawn? What do you notice.

Many churches, when a service is not going on, can provide a haven from the busy world outside — enjoy the quietness. Look at the notice board, or pick up a newsletter.

You might also...

Spend some time in Prayer.

Go to Mass at this church.

Next Steps

If you are interested in learning about the Catholic Church or about becoming a Catholic.

There are a number of next steps you might take:

Find your local parish — Catholics are members of a universal Church united across which is grounded in the local.

Catholic Faith is a website of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales which is for those who wish to understand a bit more about what Catholics believe.

People & Stories

Read the stories of other people who have begun the journey you are now contemplating.

Donna — “It was the process of coming along to Mass and witnessing something special and feeling I wanted to be part of it.”

Frances — “The people in the group were so encouraging, and listened to me too.”

Julie — “It felt like I'd come home.”

Mary — “I wanted to ask about God and prayer, and what the Church is.”

Rebecca — “As the weeks went by I realised that I was in fact on an important journey, and that my life was improving for the better – I was becoming a happier, calmer and more peaceful person.”

Donna's Story

My daughter went to the Catholic school. I got involved and I decided maybe I should be a Catholic because there's something special about these people in the community that resonated with who I was.

When I said I wanted to learn about the Catholic

Church, because of my situation being a single mum, I had house visits for RCIA. It was the process of coming along to Mass and witnessing something special and feeling I wanted to be part of it.

When I began as enquirer I felt welcome and very well supported and it was good to be in a group and enjoy the discussion with others in the same circumstances as me. I liked the prayer aspect of the sessions. Being a Catholic is the best thing I ever did, and I feel like its like coming home.

Frances' Story

I was sent to the Salvation Army Sunday School every week when I was a child – ‘to get me out of the house and give my parents some peace they said! They were not Christians, but were happy for me to go. I loved all the bible stories at and the singing too.

Once I'd left home at 16, I didn't go to Church any more. Meanwhile, my brother Phil met a girl called Jane, and they got married. Jane was a Catholic, but didn't go to church. Jane and Phil tried to have a baby for 10 years. Amazingly, in the following year, she did get pregnant, and their son Sean was born. They had him baptised in the Catholic Church, and the priest allowed me to be Godmother.

Shortly afterwards, very tragically my sister-in-law Jane died. I knew that Jane wanted Sean to be brought up Catholic, so I decided I would take him to church, and that's what I did! Every Sunday I took the baby to Mass. I didn't understand what was going on in the Mass, but people loved the baby, and were very kind and welcoming. Soon Sean began to walk and talk, and I realised I couldn't explain to him what was going on in Church. I noticed a bit in the Parish Newsletter that invited people who weren't baptised to come along and find out more about becoming a Catholic Christian. So I just turned up. In fact I felt excited at the idea of really belonging after of coming to Mass in this parish for six years. In the sessions, I found all the bible readings came alive in a new way, and I seemed to be getting to know Jesus as a friend rather than a figure in a story book. The people in the group were so encouraging, and listened to me too. They said my enthusiasm was catching! I was baptised last Easter. It was amazing. I'm the happiest I've ever been.

Julie's Story

It was the process of coming along to Mass and witnessing something special and feeling I wanted to be part of it. My husband and children were Catholics. When the children went to school – the people felt really nice and genuine and I felt these people have something special and that was a draw. I got married in Catholic Church, and I read the newsletter, and ever September I saw the notice about are you interested in learning more about the Catholic Church. So one year I decided I would go along. It was in the upstairs room. There were only eight of us and I was the only non catholic. So I left it for a year. When the next year came round, I went along and there was a group of non Catholics. I had issues, resistance – I put up a barrier over fears – bells & smells. I wanted to enquire without feeling pushed, and I felt I was allowed to do that. I enjoyed meeting weekly. I enjoyed the continuity of it. A week was long enough to chew things over. What did it feel like to be welcomed as an enquirer? It was awesome. It felt like I'd come home. It was like I found a place that was there for me, but I hadn't known it was there. It just felt primal. It was a good ritual. For me I was already part of the community. A way of acknowledging I'd made that step; it was for everybody there to witness that I was making the journey.

Mary's Story

I would say I was an atheist for as long as I can remember! I have been married to Brian for five years now, and he's a Catholic. I have been coming to church with him most Sundays, out of curiosity really. When Tim, our baby was born, Brian wanted to get him baptised, so I attended the Baptism Preparation sessions for parents, and found myself beginning to question 'faith' for myself. I realised something was happening, which I couldn't explain! I had a chat with the priest on my own, and he invited me to come along to the 'Journey in Faith', no pressure, and just see how I found it. I was very nervous about that first evening, but I recognised the people in the group from the Sunday Mass, and they made me very welcome. In fact most of them didn't realise I wasn't a Catholic! They let me just sit and get used to the group first, and made it easy for me to ask questions too – anything I wanted to ask about God and prayer, and what the Church is. A few weeks ago, I took my first 'step' towards becoming a Catholic. It was called The Rite of Acceptance – and I found this a very moving experience, one Sunday morning at the

Family Mass, with Brian and Tim, and I felt really supported by the whole parish community. It really felt right – like finding my way to where I should be!

Rebecca's Story

The decision to embark on my journey to becoming a catholic was not one that I made quickly or alone. My Fiancé, Chris, had always joked that I would have to become a Catholic if he were ever to marry me. Despite the jokes I knew that it was important to him, and so I made my decision.

I knew all about RCIA through my soon to be brother-in-law who went through the process a couple of years ago himself. He told me what to expect and I soon became excited to begin attending the sessions on a Tuesday evening. I had my doubts, and was convinced that I would have questions that would never be answered. I believed that I would enjoy the process of learning about Catholicism from an academic perspective, but expected little else.

My very first week at RCIA completely turned my expectation on its head, as did so many of the sessions after that. I not only learnt a great deal about Catholicism and what my life as a catholic would entail in a practical sense, but more importantly I learnt much more about myself, and about the God that had been there for a long time – out of sight and out of mind, but there nonetheless. The catechists who so quickly became my friends showed me the path I needed to follow, but the rest was up to me.

As the weeks went by I realised that I was in fact on an important journey, and that my life was improving for the better – I was becoming a happier, calmer and more peaceful person.

On Sunday 31 January I was formally welcomed into the church I attend each Sunday since I moved to Wigan back in August. Whilst I had never been made to feel unwelcome, I always felt that I was not the same as everyone else – something was missing, and I was an outsider. That day I stood on the altar and proclaimed my desire to become a Catholic in front of my family and the congregation. As I stepped down off of the altar the whole congregation began to applaud. It was as though I had achieved something wonderful and I was touched that this group of people who did not know me so openly welcomed me into their community. I sat in the front row and as everyone moved to the front of the church to receive communion, people came to congratulate and welcome me. I was truly

astonished at the reception I received.

On Sunday 14 February my family and I were welcomed to the Metropolitan Cathedral in Liverpool for the Rite of Election. I was joined by catechumens from across the diocese as Archbishop Malcolm welcomed us each in turn and invited us to enter our names into the Book of the Elect. The service was relaxed but that did not detract from the importance of the day. I felt proud to stand with my family and my friends behind me, my godparents at my shoulder.

INFORMATION

Here you will find information about RCIA (the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) — the way that the Church welcomes new members

Starter Questions

What is it? — An overview of how the Catholic Church welcomes new members.

Who is it for? — Is this the right place for you.

Who will be involved? — Who you might you meet.

The Shape of the Rite

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is a process which is marked by a series of stages

Stage 1 — A time of beginnings and asking questions

Stage 2 — A deepening understanding of what it means to be a Catholic in all aspects of life.

Stage 3 — The time for commitment

Stage 4 — A chance to reflect and live a new life.

An Analogy — Looking at how the experience of getting married mirrors the different stages of becoming a Catholic.

Further Information

In the **Questions** section there is a Glossary and a number of Frequently Asked Questions

Questions

Frequently Asked Questions

When contemplating these things you will have lots of questions. We have put together a number of questions that other people have asked and offer some answers.

Glossary

Like many areas of life the Catholic Church is full of words which are used without thinking by

members but can be unclear to those who are less familiar.

Frequently asked questions

In these responses we have given general answers. There may well be differences in practice due to local circumstances and your own personal situation.

How long will it take?

As a rule as long as it needs to but in general at least a year.

When might I become a Catholic?

If you are unbaptised (have not been christened) the normal time for baptism is at Easter (Spring). If you have been baptised into another Christian denomination you can be received into the Church at any point when you are ready. Many parishes however like to keep everyone together and so everyone becomes members of the Church at Easter.

Will I be pressurised? Is there a deadline?

No. As mentioned above the Church has a timetable that centres around Easter each year but there will be time for reflection and discernment both by you and the parish team before you make this big step. If you do not feel ready to make this step you can wait.

What do I need to do to join the Church?

Become a member of a group at the local church which will consist of people in a similar situation to yourself together with members of the church. You will have an opportunity to both learn about the Catholic Church and to reflect on what you are seeking.

Is it a course – does it cost me anything?

How each parish goes about preparing people will be different but you can expect that it will include looking at scripture, information about what Catholics believe, time for prayer and reflection, engagement in the life of the parish community. There will be no cost.

What things might keep from being a Catholic?

First of all you may decide that this is not right for you and you will be free you leave when you wish. Sometimes people's marriage or life situation can pose a difficulty where it might not concur with the Church's understanding of these matters. In many parishes near the beginning of the process their will be a confidential interview with the priest to see if there are any such questions and what solutions may be possible. In such situations it is important to be honest, to identify anything early on and not to have

preconceptions. The Church will want to help you respond to God's call in your life.

Do I need to know a Catholic to become a Catholic?

Not necessarily – though it will be important that through the time of preparation you get to know people in the local Catholic community. You will get to know people in the RCIA group and they will also help you find a Sponsor who is a 'faith-friend'.

I am not sure whether I was baptised – does it make a difference?

You can only be baptised once. The Catholic Church recognises that the baptism people receive in other Christian denominations is valid and so you would not be baptised again. If you are not sure it is usually possible to check the records of the place where you were baptised.

I was brought up Church of England will that make a difference?

The Catholic Church recognises and values your baptism. You have a different starting point to someone who is not yet baptised. You will eventually be received into the Church and given the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist. How and when this happens may depend on you and the parish. Is it possible in some parishes that, if you have been an active member of the Church, they will discern with you what areas of teaching you need help with and how you might best be introduced into the parish community and then you might be received when you are ready – at what ever time of year. For others, who perhaps were baptised as infants and have had less contact with the Church, you will take your place alongside those who are preparing for baptism.

My spouse is Catholic and I have been going to Mass for years – can't I just be done quickly?

Becoming a Catholic is a big decision in someone's life and it needs time and space for the decision to be taken. Why this decision, now? What is God asking of me? Even when we are familiar with something we may still have uncertainties and questions. You may also be an asset to the group because you will have experience and insight about what it means to be part of a Catholic community both at home and in the parish.

There some aspects of the Catholic Church I have questions about?

Through the process you will have a chance to ask your questions and to discover what the Catholic Church teaches and why. You will also

learn that the Church places different levels of importance on different areas of faith and practice.

Can I bring a friend to the meeting?

This may depend on local circumstances and it may be best to check with a member of the team.

I work shifts – Will I have to go to every meeting?

It is usually important to attend every meeting but you should discuss your situation with a member of the parish team and they will explore different ways of supporting you.

How will I know whether this is right for me?

If you look through the 'Shape of the Rite' you will see there are two key moments when you will reflect with members of the parish team about readiness to make a stronger commitment. This will not just be based on your understanding of what you have heard and what questions you have but also on how this has affected the way you live your life. You should always be able to say that I am not ready yet or I want to take more time.

Who should I contact? Who should I ask for?

Different parishes will work in different ways. Many parishes now have websites which will give a contact number/address for the parish priest. It may also give details of the group and who to contact. You may also find this information from the noticeboard outside the church or, if it is open, from posters or leaflets in the entrance or from copies of the weekly newsletter. If you ring the main parish number you may get the parish priest or a parish secretary who will be able to give you details of meetings and put you in contact with someone from the parish. To find your local parish see Next Steps.

Do I have choice of which parish I go to?

It is good to go to your local parish as it means that you will get to know people who live in the same area as you. However each parish has its own character and some people can find that a different parish suits them best. If you live in a rural area your choice of parish will probably be dictated by distance whereas in an urban area you may have more choice.

Is there anything I can do now?

Whenever you contact the parish it should be ready to welcome you. Sometimes the group may be having a break but the parish should be able to put you in contact with the team and allow you to make your first steps. If you have not done so you can explore the different ideas in

the [Encounters](#) section.

Is there a book I could read?

A good place to start is with one of the Gospels which tell the story of the life of Jesus. There are 4 Gospels. The Gospel of St Mark is the shortest and is generally thought to be the first written. The Gospels of St Matthew and St Luke contain some of the most familiar stories both about Jesus and also told by him. The Gospel of St John is the most poetic of the four. To download copies of these text go to the [Scripture](#) page. The Gospels are found at the beginning of the New Testament which is the second half of the Bible. Most bookshops will have a number of Bibles and the New Testament can be sold separately. Choose one which you find easy to hold and read. There are many translations of the Bible ones to look out for include: Jerusalem Bible, or New Revised Standard Version. If you want to learn more about the Catholic faith an attractive place to start is *YouCat* (or the *Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church*). Though it aimed at young people it is easily read by all ages. It gives a comprehensive overview of the Church's teaching in a question and answer format and this is accompanied by images and short quotations from saints and others. It is a book for dipping into rather than reading from cover to cover immediately. It is published by [Catholic Truth Society](#) - ISBN 9781860827280

Do I need to know Latin?

No. Though Latin remains the official language of the Church for its documents it is not something that every Catholic experiences. For some the celebration of the liturgy in Latin and the great heritage of Church music is part of the attraction of the Church.

My Catholic friends uses words I don't understand - will they be explained?

Any area of life which we are unfamiliar with will have jargon or technical words which are used by those who know but can be mystifying to those outside. This website has a [Glossary](#) which may include some of those words but you should also be able to ask in your group about anything you do not understand.

I am a Catholic, my non-Catholic friend is asking me all these questions what do I say?

Do not worry if you do not feel you can answer every question you are a friend not a theologian. Pope Francis reminds us that first of all we are called to be witnesses to Christ. To be a witness we need to know him and know what difference he makes in our lives. Introduce him so he can become a friend of your friend. Have a look

through the [Encounters](#) section, you may be able to follow through some of the ideas together.

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.

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.

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 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

In the RCIA it is usual that there will be a team who work together to lead the process. The Parish Priest may have others who work with him both ordained (a Deacon or another Priest) and lay (e.g. Catechist).

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.

Priest

A man who has answered God's call is through the Sacrament of Ordination empowered to celebrate the Sacraments for the the service of the Church.

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.

Booklet formatted by
Joseph C. Rodriguez

With acknowledgement to
The Archdiocese of Liverpool