 **O.C.I.A. / Becoming CATHOLIC**  
O.C.I.A. (or simply "OCIA") stands for the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults, the process by which an adult person is initiated into the Catholic Church, through Baptism, Confirmation, and First Holy Communion.  Through this process the adult is formed in the Christian faith, with the local parish community serving as both catechists and models.  
  
**Who is in the O.C.I.A.?**  
\*  Un-baptized adults  
\*  Adults baptized in non-Trinitarian formula  
\*  Adults baptized as Catholic, but lack First Holy Communion and Confirmation  
\*  Adults baptized & confirmed infants in the Catholic Church, but lack First Holy Communion  
\*  Adults baptized in other Christian Churches, in the Trinitarian formula with water  
    
**A History of OCIA**  
O.C.I.A. has been around since the early Church - and was the method in which the Church prepared un-baptized adults to be received into the Christian Church (which later became known as the Catholic Church).  The O.C.I.A. process was an intense period of study, prayer, and conversion which (in the Church's early days) often lasted up to three years.  During the process, a sponsor would testify to the entire assembly of the conversion, authenticity, and genuine readiness of the individual.  After some time, the process was put aside and in its place private preparation was used.  
  
**O.C.I.A. in the Modern Era**  
The Second Vatican Council brought back the O.C.I.A. process in keeping with the spirit of communal participation of the whole Church.  Inquirers enter into a public process, are formed in community, and integrated into the life of the Church through that community.   
  
Keeping in the spirit of the original preparation, the base elements of study, prayer, community, and discernment remain and are integral, though persons may now possibly enter the Church in a shorter time-frame, based on his/her needs.  While there are standards or measures by which to discern a person's proper place in the O.C.I.A., and how long each will be in each phase, there is no absolute schedule for an OCIA process to run; it varies from parish to parish, and with person-to-person.  
  
The decision to accept baptism, or to become a Catholic, or to complete one's Catholic initiation must be the free will of each person.  The Catholic Church does not coerce, guilt, nor do we manipulate this decision.        
  
Regardless of a person's age or circumstances, the Church is tasked with the duties, rights, and responsibilities to ensure that each individual meets the requirements set out by the Code of Canon Law, as well as publicly demonstrates the desire, readiness, and lifestyle that reflects acceptance and understanding of the Gospel and becoming a member of the Catholic Church.   
  
**O.C.I.A. Phases**  
The Order of Christian Initiation of Adults is comprised of four phases.  These phases follow the experience of conversion to and initiation in the Christian faith.  
  
**Inquiry** (aka: Evangelization): This phase mimics the first experience of hearing the Word of God, of becoming aware of God's presence, love, and work in our lives.  In this first awareness, one is getting to know who God is through storytelling of their own life and the stories of the Bible.  It is the phase in which the first stirrings of faith in Jesus Christ begin.  For one that is already baptized, it is a re-awakening of that awareness and beginning of renewal, as well as first intentional integration into the community of believers.  The duration of time in this phase for the un-baptized and baptized, but un-catechized may be anywhere from 6 weeks to six months, depending on how one progresses.  
  
Ritual: Rite of Acceptance (un-baptized) and Rite of Welcome (baptized) for those that have indicated, and given evidence of conversion, and desire to follow the way of Christ through the Catholic Church.  
  
**Catechumenate**: This phase is the apprenticeship towards Christian discipleship.  It is accomplished through formal instruction in the core teachings and beliefs (doctrine) of the faith and experienced through liturgy, service, and parish community life.  This comprehensive approach aims for a thorough integration of the faith.  The Catechumenate follows the liturgical cycle of the Church since that is how the faith is experienced in daily life.  For the un-baptized, and the un-catechized, at least one full liturgical year is required, but this may last possibly longer, depending on when a person begins and how they progress.  For one who is baptized and well-catechized, this period is fit to one's individual needs, but still retains the necessary formation from both formal instruction and integration with the parish.    
  
Ritual: Rite of Election for the un-baptized who have given clear evidence of acquaintance and integration of the core teachings and beliefs and desire to accept baptism.  Call to Continuing Conversion for the baptized who also demonstrate acquaintance and integration of the core teachings and beliefs and desire to complete their initiation or come into full communion with the Catholic Church.  
  
**Purity & Enlightenment**: This phase, indicated by its name points to an intense, inward reflection and discernment.  In this phase, the candidate seeks to be purified in their intentions to follow Christ more fully, to recognize any sinful attachments or attitudes that still separate or diminish their relationship with Christ, and to receive the light they need to follow him more authentically.  It is no longer a time to "learn teachings that were not picked up" - those must be completed fully prior to beginning this phase.  Included in this phase are spiritual retreats, and smaller rituals intended to support and assist each person.  This phase occurs for the un-baptized and un-catechized (baptized) during Lent, following a 1-2 liturgical year preparation in the Catechumenate.  For the baptized that are well catechized, this phase is adapted to fit their needs, whenever that may be.   
  
Ritual: Sacraments of Initiation - Baptism, Confirmation, First Holy Communion for the un-baptized.  For the baptized, Profession of Faith for non-Catholics, plus Confirmation and First Holy Communion.  For the baptized only Catholic, Confirmation and First Holy Communion.  
  
**Mystagogia**: It is said that all of the baptized faithfuls are continuing this phase because we are still reflecting on the story of Christ, and still experiencing the conversion from our Christian initiation, regardless of when that occurred.  The Mystagogia, strictly speaking, occurs for the neophytes and newly professed members for the period between Easter and Pentecost.  Some experts propose a year-long mystagogia.  The mystagogia period is similar to the story of walk along the road Emmaus.  The disciples were so excited and filled with wonder telling the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection that they did not recognize it was Christ to whom they were speaking, until the breaking of the bread.  He helped them understand his story in relation to the Scriptures, and all they had experienced.  It is a time of reflection, celebration, and active participation in the life and mission of the Church.  For the newly-baptized, this may be a longer period than the six weeks after Easter. For the baptized, newly professed, this period is adapted to individual needs.  
  
**Is O.C.I.A. a lecture series for anyone to attend?**  
O.C.I.A. is a discernment and preparation process, not an adult education lecture series or catechism for Catholics seeking to refresh their own knowledge of the faith.  Because of the trust needed for participants to share openly, this process is only for those discerning to enter the Church.  To respect the inherent vulnerability and sensitive nature of the process, we refrain from inviting general visitors/parishioners to attend.  The only non-participants that are permitted are team members, clergy, and sponsors.     
  
Adult Catholics seeking to learn more about the faith should inquire into Adult Education opportunities offered in the parish.  To learn more about these events, please return to the header "Adult Ed" and see programs listed (excluding OCIA & Adult Confirmation).