



The Fishers of St. Thomas More



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Dear Candidates,

The bishop of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston (Cardinal DiNardo) establishes our mission as RCIA team. We are responsible to him for implementing his instructions as fully and faithfully as we can. In preparing you to become Catholic, our mission from the bishop concerns the areas of church doctrine and the actual practice of the faith. For you to be fully ready to be initiated into the Catholic Church, you need to have sufficient understanding of church teaching as well as to be “practicing” the faith. Our Sunday morning sessions are aimed in the direction of forming you in both of these areas; however, for a variety of reasons, it is difficult for us to be sure that our responsibility for your formation has been fully met. Some of the reasons for this difficulty include:

- Unlike children who begin with no background of formation, adults have individual needs. The better we know you, the better we can sense your needs and the progress you are making. Children are regularly tested to measure progress. Testing may not be a good method with adults and so we avoid formal testing in the RCIA.
- Because the STM RCIA is a year-round process with participants at different stages it is difficult to keep up with each person’s journey.
- Participants miss class from time to time. We don’t take roll and don’t know who may have missed what.
- Your active participation in class is an essential element of the formation process; however, even with that we cannot be sure you have taken away the important lessons.
- RCIA is built around the weekly scripture readings at Mass. Over a three-year cycle you would be exposed to all the key components of your formation. Most of you do not experience a full three-year time of formation.

Recognizing the above limitations and wanting to be faithful to our mission as directed by the bishop, we have decided that the following approach should be taken:

Doctrinal Approach

In addition to your regular attendance and active participation in Sunday morning classes, you are asked to make a thorough, personal study of the catechism. Each of you should have in your personal possession a copy of the book, *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* (USCCA) and/or *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC). You should be familiar with all the material presented in the USCCA or CCC, including the Appendix and Glossary. We recommend you work your way straight through the entire book, writing down any questions you have so you can discuss them with your sponsor or bring them to class. You can also arrange to meet individually with any team member to discuss your questions. You will also want to review relevant sections in these books regarding material that is presented in class. We often give you handouts and/or references. These should be reviewed.

You need to supplement the above by doing additional reading to assure that you are familiar with the Precepts of the Catholic Church (see CCC 2041ff.) as well as Church law regarding valid reception of the sacraments, especially as it pertains to Eucharist, Reconciliation, and Matrimony.

How well should you know this material? There are three broadly defined levels of understanding something: (1) you read (or listen) and comprehend and believe what you have read or heard; (2) you can give a reasonable summary of church teaching without having to look it up; and (3) you can teach it to someone who does not understand it initially. Before you become Catholic, you should have achieved the first two levels and you should have developed a desire to one day reach level 3.

From time to time perhaps, and definitely towards the end of your formation, there will be an informal meeting with you, your sponsor, and a team member in which each participant will be able to assess your achievement of level 2. You will be asked to explain in your own words various aspects of church doctrine as part of this meeting. Nothing needs to be memorized!

Practices Approach

In addition to *knowledge* of Church doctrine, your formation involves putting that knowledge into concrete practice in your Christian life. The Catholic way of life in Christ involves both optional and mandatory practices. Mandatory practices constitute those practices that we typically refer to when we use the phrase, “he/she is a ‘practicing Catholic.’” There are more optional practices or private devotions, good in themselves, than anyone could or should try to follow at any one time or perhaps in any one lifetime, any more than one would go into a restaurant and order everything on the menu at one meal. They are meant to enhance our growth in our life in Christ. At various times in your journey you will want to turn to many of them.

Our purpose is to insure that you are aware of and “in tune with” the mandatory practices as a minimum. There should also be some indication of your awareness of other practices and that you may be engaged in some of them.

A practicing Catholic knows and seriously strives to obey the moral teaching of the Church. This includes such things as the Ten Commandments and the Precepts of the Church. Attending Mass every Sunday, receiving Holy Communion, regular celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation, observing Church teaching relative to the married state of life (*even if you are not married*), etc., fall into this category. The above “list” is not intended to be a complete list of mandatory practices. A one-line summary might be this: that you live a life in accordance with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Inasmuch as the “practices” involve observance of moral teachings, and your moral state is between you and God, the RCIA team and your sponsor will look for objective, observable indications that you are progressing in the practice of the faith. Observing your attendance at Mass on Sundays and participation in dismissal, breaking open the Word, and the class are normal ways we can see evidence you are progressing. Participating in the life of the parish, especially in areas of prayer and works of charity, is another way you show that you are becoming Catholic in your life style. Unlike in the case of doctrine, there is no checklist you can follow. The ways you can show love for God and neighbor are infinite in number; however, as a minimum level of such participation, we ask that you experience at least one “spiritual growth” ministry and one “corporal works of mercy” ministry that is part of the St. Thomas More parish life. The team and your sponsor will help you with this. We ask you to share your experiences with the class.

Conclusion

A practicing Catholic is a growing Catholic. Your knowledge of Sacred Scripture (the Bible) and Church teaching, your practice of worship and prayer, and your spreading the Good News (evangelization of others) through works of mercy and charity will help you grow ever more deeply in the life in Christ.

You may have or discover more areas you wish to discuss. Please come to any of us, any time, if we can be of help.

The Fishers

(The STM RCIA Team)

Some Questions To Encourage Your Personal Study

1. What is God's will for the destiny of every human being?
2. How are we saved?
3. What do we mean by "The Pascal Mystery"?
4. What do we mean by "the four last things"?
5. List the seven sacraments
6. List the Holy Days of Obligation and explain what each pertains to.
7. List the Ten Commandments.
8. List the Precepts of the Catholic Church.
9. Define: Original Sin, actual sin, mortal sin, and venial sin.
10. What are the effects of Baptism and Confirmation?
11. What is necessary for the valid reception of the sacrament of marriage by a Catholic?
12. What is necessary for the licit reception of the sacrament of Holy Communion? How does one receive Holy Communion?
13. How does one "go to confession" (celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation) and what is necessary for the valid reception of this sacrament?
14. What do we mean by the Magisterium of the Catholic Church?
15. What are the teachings of the Catholic Church Catholics must believe? (This is not a list of teachings. It is a classification description.) Give a few examples. Where can you find a basic list?
16. Under what circumstances (if any) may a Catholic question (doubt) a Church teaching?
17. Under what circumstances (if any) may a Catholic disobey Church teaching?
18. What does the Church teach regarding the regulation of conception?
19. What does the Church teach regarding abortion, euthanasia, and capital punishment?
20. What do we mean when we say that Christ is truly present in the Eucharist?
21. If we, as Catholics, attend a non-Catholic religious service with a friend or spouse, should we receive communion if it is offered? Why, or why not? Are there any instances of exceptions to the usual answer to this question?
22. Define the following Marian doctrines: Immaculate Conception; Assumption; Mother of God; Ever Virgin.
23. What are angels? Devils?
24. What does the "communion of saints" mean?
25. What is prayer? What are some of the various kinds of prayer?
26. What is the fundamental principle of social justice?
27. Describe the liturgical year.

The Fishers

General Information

The Roman Catholic Church observes a process for initiating new members into its faith community. The process is called the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). “**The Fishers**” is a name chosen by the ministry team at St. Thomas More for its identification as a team.

You are encouraged to visit the web site set up by and for **The Fishers**. You can find us at: <http://stmfishers.org/> By going to the web site at least once per month, you can obtain the latest schedule and other information. The schedule, in particular, is something you will need to pay close attention to. There are important dates you will need to track and keep clear as you move through the process of the RCIA.

In general, the dates of the following activities are important for you to know about:

1. Rite of Acceptance (and/or) Welcoming
2. Rite of Initiation outside the Easter Vigil
3. Retreat days, usually in January or February
4. Schedule during season of Lent, especially:
 - a. First Sunday of Lent (Rite of Sending, Rite of Election)
 - b. Wednesday “Preparation for Scrutinies;”
 - c. 3rd, 4th, 5th Sunday of Lent, Rite of Scrutiny;
 - d. Palm Sunday anointing
 - e. Holy Saturday rehearsal, time of prayer
 - f. Holy Saturday “Easter Vigil”
5. Special events (e.g., Oktoberfest, Gift Sunday, etc.)
6. Mystagogy group activities

If you can anticipate possible scheduling conflicts, please inform us. Here is how to get in touch:

1. For Wednesday inquiry group members, please call Cathey or Deacon Ed Stoessel, 713-995-0873. You can send email to Deacon Ed by going to this web site selecting the “Contact Us” link.
2. For Sunday morning meetings of Candidates and Catechumens, please contact your sponsor in addition to Cathey or Deacon Ed Stoessel.
3. For Mystagogy sessions (usually on Sundays, but not every week) contact Jan Tennert (she will give you information on how to contact her). As a backup, contact Cathey or Deacon Ed Stoessel.

It is important that we have an up-to-date way to contact you by telephone and, if possible, email. Please be sure you inform us of any changes.