

RCIA PRESENTATION

Hello everyone. My name is Mary Zobec from St Augustine's Kyabram.

I have been asked to give a little presentation on the RCIA Program.

I am sure many of you have already heard about the RCIA program and may already have it in your parishes. (check which parishes have it in their parishes)

Has anyone here been involved in an RCIA program?

Firstly, today I am going to give you an overview of the process.

There are Four Stages of RCIA

- **Inquiry (Pre-Catechumenate):** This is the starting phase. It is an informal, no-obligation time to ask questions, learn about the basics of the Gospel, and explore what it means to be Catholic.
- **Catechumenate:** Once ready, participants enter this instructional phase. It involves regular classes to learn Catholic teachings, Scripture, prayer, and Church traditions.

During this stage we have the Rite of Welcome where participants are welcomed and introduced into the faith community.

- **Purification & Enlightenment:** Usually aligned with the season of Lent, this is an intense, six-week period of spiritual reflection, prayer, and preparation. It includes special ceremonies in Mass called *Scrutinies*.

During this period, we also have the Rite of Acceptance at the Cathedral. This rite is where participants firmly make their commitment to be received into the Catholic faith.

Participants are not obliged to be received at Easter Vigil if they are not ready even though it is the preferred time. There is flexibility depending on circumstances.

- **Mystagogy:** The final stage taking place during the 50 days between Easter and Pentecost. Newly initiated members now called neophytes reflect on the sacraments they've received and deeply integrate into the parish community.

Ok, that is the process/program, so now we need a team and resources.

The RCIA Team and Resources

The most important resource of the process is the RCIA team.

It is built upon relationships, prayer, discernment, and accompaniment.

The team needs to be committed and flexible.

Team members need to have hearts that are willing to listen, discern, and accompany others in faith, be compassionate companions, offering friendship and support throughout the journey. We remind participants that we are not counsellors or experts with all the answers; rather, we are fellow pilgrims walking alongside those who are seeking God.

We work together to prepare for the weekly sessions, drawing upon Scripture, the Catechism, approved study materials, and other reliable resources.

Our team at Kyabram takes its inspiration from the Road to Emmaus story (Luke 24:13–35). Like Jesus accompanying the disciples on the road, the RCIA team walks alongside participants, listens to their stories, opens the Scriptures, and helps them encounter Christ.

From Luke 24:32 "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"

An example of flexibility is that during Covid, we met with our participant via zoom. She also lived in a nearby town and had become pregnant. We had a break in the later part of the pregnancy and after the birth. So when restrictions eased, we went to her town and met in a pub to make it easier for her. Talk about spirituality in a pub.

Another example is that a few of years ago, our participant worked shift work and we worked around her to accommodate her.

Over the last couple of years our team at Kyabram has grown to include past sponsors who have enjoyed journeying with participants.

Regarding resources. Over the years we have accumulated many resources, however over the last couple of years we have used "At home with God's people" as a guide and some videos from the Alpha program. There are also some good resources from Archdiocese of Melbourne which can be found on their website. A couple of us who are tech savvy have created PowerPoints

presentations as we are fortunate to have access to a television and a computer. This will make it easier for us in the future.

Sponsors

Each participant is accompanied by a sponsor. Often this is someone they already know and trust. Where this is not possible, the RCIA team may recommend a suitable parishioner who is willing to journey with the candidate or catechumen.

Sponsors play an important role in supporting participants, sharing their faith experience, and helping them become part of the parish community.

An example is in the 2025 cohort a wonderful friendship has devolved between a participant and his sponsor. They often play golf together and hang out. It is so lovely to see. The sponsor is 70 and participant around 30.

Of course, there are many more examples.

Prayer and Discernment

Throughout the process, the RCIA team prays for each participant and continually discerns how they are progressing in their faith journey. Formation is never simply about completing lessons or covering content; it is about responding to God's call and recognising His work in each person's life.

~~(The role of the team is to help open the Scriptures and introduce participants to the teachings of the Catholic Church through the Catechism and other faithful resources, always pointing them towards a deeper relationship with Christ.)~~

A Safe Space for Growth

As already mentioned, RCIA is a journey, and participants are encouraged to see the group as a safe and welcoming space where they can ask questions, share experiences, and explore faith honestly.

Over the months we have had moments of joy, laughter, challenge, and sometimes tears. Memories and life experiences often surface during discussions. Some are positive and life-giving; others may be painful. Participants should know that they are accepted, heard, and supported. Sometimes it's also the memories and life experiences of team members that surface as well.

Many life events happen in those 6 months or so. Family issues, work issues, health issues, etc. All these play a part of the formation. The challenge is how does one manage these issues in the light of the Gospel and discover how Christ walks with us through each circumstance.

As you can imagine it can be a very vulnerable time for all involved.

As an example in the 2026 cohort, one of the participants became pregnant and was also made redundant from her job. This was a very trying time for her. Our role was to support and pray for her. She did manage to find another job closer to home which is a blessing, and we now await our RCIA baby.

The role of the Parish Priest

The parish priest also plays an important role in the process.

Apart from performing the rites, we know we have his support and trust. We keep him informed how participants are travelling.

We have our meetings on Monday evenings. This makes it difficult for Fr to join us.

However, he is available at other times to meet with our participants if required. An example in the 2025 cohort; there was one participant who met regularly with Fr at a time that suited them both. I recall that it was on a weekly basis at times as this person had a lot going on.

It all depends on the individual and their needs if they require a conversation with a priest.

The Role of the Parish Community

The responsibility for welcoming and accompanying those in RCIA does not solely belong to the team. The entire parish community has an important role to play.

Parishioners are encouraged to welcome participants, get to know them, pray for them, and foster genuine friendships. A welcoming parish community helps people experience the Church not merely as an institution, but as a family of faith.

RCIA also provides an opportunity for the **parish** itself to reflect on its mission. The presence of those seeking to join the Church should challenge every parish community to ask:

What do we have that attracts others to Christ?

By accompanying those on the journey of faith, the whole parish is invited to **renew** its own discipleship and deepen its commitment to the Gospel.

It said that RCIA gives life and vitality to the parish especially through the public rites. It's not a program that is hidden away from the public.

We have been fortunate at Kyabram that we have had participants most years over the last 30 years or so. Annette and I have been involved for a long time and enjoy journeying with people who have a heart for God.

One of the ongoing challenges is integrating participants into parish life after their initiation. This can be achieved by recognising their gifts, talents, and passions, and helping them find meaningful ways to become involved in the parish community. It is also important to maintain contact, nurture friendships, and provide ongoing support.

An example is a participant from 2026 cohort who joined the music ministry during the process. Others have joined the lectors or commentators' roster, and eucharistic minister's roster overtime.

One of the encouraging outcomes of this year has been that several participants, team members, and their husbands or wives have expressed a desire to continue gathering. In response, we have started an adult faith group that meets monthly after Mass. We have only had 2 sessions so far. While the group is still developing, there has been strong interest, and it is exciting to see how this new initiative is taking shape.

Thank you for your time today.