

THE PROCESS

In the first of these articles about RCIA, I asked that you stay tuned for a description of the RCIA process. That is what this article is about.

The RCIA is not a program; it is a process. So what's the difference? Is it just another word game? "No", it is not a word game and "yes" there is a difference. A Program has a specific beginning and a specific date for an ending. A TV show is an example of a program; it starts at a specific hour and it ends specifically a half hour or an hour later. No variation allowed. A process probably has a defined beginning, but its ending is not specific. RCIA is a process. The school year is a program.

"But in every parish RCIA always begins just after the school year begins and it ends at the Easter Vigil" you say. In many instances that is true; and probably in most instances it is ok and is appropriate. But sometimes it is true that not everyone begins at the same place in terms of their quest or what they know or what they feel they need to know or how long it takes each person to absorb information. Sometimes folks become ready at different times to move on. Sometimes, RCIA candidates come from religious backgrounds that include much information about faith and spirituality. Sometimes candidates want extra time to be sure that they are ready for conversion. So "process", the coming to completion, the coming to readiness is the key word. We are all different; we process differently. One who comes into the RCIA already having been baptized is at a different plateau than one who has not been baptized. The Spirit will help each one to know when the appropriate time of commitment has come.

Nick Wagner, a well-known catechist (teacher) of RCIA tells this story. "Years ago an RCIA team I was on encountered a woman who did not know that Jesus was the Son of God. And she had no understanding at all of the Holy Spirit. That same year, however, a Methodist man asked us about becoming Catholic. He was a good and faithful Christian. He knew Scripture better than many of us Catholics; he could speak intelligently about the Trinity; he knew the cycle of the liturgical year, and he had been participating in Sunday Mass for the last 15 years – ever since he'd married his Catholic wife. These two seekers found themselves in a catechetical process. And we had a half-dozen other folks who fell somewhere between the "uncatechized" and the "catechized" seekers. The challenge was how to shape a catechetical process that would accommodate the needs of people who were at very different places on their faith journey.

Pope John Paul II tells us, "At the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, the only Son of God the Father..." "It is Christ alone who teaches, anyone else teaches to the extent that he is Christ's spokesman, enabling Christ to teach with the catechist's lips..." Again, Nick Wagner, "Catechesis is always an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ. It is a relationship process. The "catechist" - the one leading the relationship process - is always Jesus Christ."

You are free and encouraged to enter the process at any time.

