



*My dear Priests and People*

*Welcoming new members is one of the most wonderful experiences in the life of the Church. It brings new life and vigour not only to the newly baptised but to the whole Church community.*

*In the early Church, people seeking baptism spent a long time in formation. But as more people were baptised in infancy, this process, known as the Catechumenate, almost disappeared.*

*When the Bishops of the Second Vatican Council were considering effective ways to spread the Good News to the world in the twentieth century, and to enrich the life of the Church with new members, they decided to restore the adult Catechumenate.*

*Introduced in 1972 and presented in final form in 1986, the Church's **Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults**, which includes the Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age, is now the norm for all who desire to become Catholic.*

*The Rite is not an option; it is the way the Church now welcomes new members, and it involves everyone. All Catholics, laity and ordained alike, share the work of responding to those who desire to follow Christ with us as members of the Church.*

*May the Lord be with us as we journey together in the ways of faith. May the Spirit of Jesus guide us in this special work of forming the people of God.*



*May God bless you all.*

*+ Patrick Dunn*

*Bishop of Auckland*

## What is the RCIA?

### The **Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults**

(RCIA) is the parish-based process which leads unbaptised people to full membership of the Catholic Church through the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.

Children of catechetical age (seven years and over) who have not yet been baptised are initiated into the Church by the same parish-based process, suitably adapted to their needs.

Nevertheless students in Catholic schools may also be assisted in their preparation for the sacraments by teachers, chaplains and members of their school community, in relationship with their local parish.

The process is also accepted as the appropriate form of preparation for those already baptised who seek full communion with the Catholic Church.

## Who is responsible?

*‘The people of God, as represented by the local Church, should understand and show by their concern that the initiation of adults is the responsibility of all the baptised’ (RCIA P.9).*

**THE WHOLE PARISH** has a care for the gathering and nurturing of new members. The entire community welcomes them and delegates some from among its members to accompany them on their journey of faith.

**THE BISHOP**, as part of his overall pastoral care of the diocese, personally and actively promotes the RCIA and normally welcomes the new members himself by presiding at one of the rites.

**THE PASTOR** plays a special role in ministering to the pastoral & spiritual care of those on the journey and those accompanying them.

**SPONSORS** are delegated by the parish community to take an active and supportive role as companions, witnesses and guides for those seeking to join the Catholic Church.

**A TEAM OF CATECHISTS** is responsible for guiding the formation process of the members of the group. As those in formation share their experience of God in their own lives, catechists guide them to deeper reflection on the Word of God and greater understanding of the faith of the Church.

## How does it work?

The initiation of new members is a gradual process of at least one year which takes place within the community of the faithful. This adult journey of faith has four stages. Movement through each stage is marked by public liturgical rites which are like milestones on the way.

## **STAGE 1**

Stage 1 is a time for the enquiry and experience of the life of faith in the Catholic Church.

The **RITE OF ACCEPTANCE** is the first milestone which marks the end of the stage of enquiry and leads into the Catechumenate.

