RCIA is now ‘OCIA’: What’s in a name?

For anyone interested in becoming Catholic, wishing to complete the sacraments or wanting to learn more about what the church teaches, the answer for decades was “join RCIA.”

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, the process by which the church brings in new converts and educates catechumens and candidates, has been a staple in Catholic life and lingo for years.

But in November 2021, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops changed the name of one of the best-known acronyms in the church, reorienting the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) into the new Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA).

So, is the new answer simply, “join OCIA”? Yes, but there’s more to it than that.

The change from “rite” to “order” is in part because of a retranslation of the Latin name into English, said Mercy Sister Esther Mary Nickel, director of sacred worship in the Archdiocese of Detroit’s Department of Evangelization and Missionary Discipleship.

It might seem like semantics but changing the process of entering the church from a “rite” to an “order” has practical implications, Sister Nickel said.

The new structure is meant to invite candidates and catechumens into a continuous process of spiritual formation as opposed to fixed checkpoints on the path to baptism, first Communion and confirmation.

The catechumenate is meant to be an ongoing formation process in which the initiated are invited to become involved in the parish, attend Mass and OCIA classes and work with catechists in delving into topics such as creation, salvation, the sacraments, the church and the four “last things” (death, judgment, heaven and hell).

Still part of the OCIA process are rites such as the Rite of Entrance to the Catechumenate and the Rite of Sending, which both occur at the parish level,

and the Rite of Election, which occurs at the cathedral with the bishop, said Amy Wyss, associate director of sacred worship at the archdiocese.

“Following that is a series of rites called the scrutinies, and after that are the Rites of Initiation,” Wyss explained.

These rites are not new to the church, but by making the entire process an “order,” the candidate or catechumen understands the rites received in church or at the parish are just one part of the ongoing journey of discipleship that will culminate with baptism and confirmation — usually during the Easter Vigil — but will continue throughout their lives.

“It’s about a relationship with Jesus Christ. It’s about coming to knowledge of Jesus Christ and then bringing my life into conformity with his teachings. Yes, we have these beautiful experiences in the liturgy that are integrally part of this. But what is happening is the process of coming into relationshisp with our Lord,” she said.

To find out more about OCIA at St. Joseph Parish, contact Barbara Heininger by calling the Parish Office: 248-446-8700 Ext. 101.