

Tailoring formed.org resources to RCIA candidates

“SYMBOLON is the catechism in a video program. It’s beautifully produced and easy to access.”

Tina Gregory

Coordinator of Communication and Adult Enrichment
St. Michael Catholic Church, Livermore, CA

At any one time, St. Michael Catholic Church in Livermore, California, has 30 to 50 people involved in its adult formation programs and RCIA.

As anyone who has been involved in RCIA ministry knows, candidates come from vastly different backgrounds. Some have never been a member of a religion, and some have received the first two Sacraments of Initiation and need only to be confirmed. Others are fully initiated Catholics who have not practiced the faith since childhood and desire some “brushing up.” The candidates’ Mass attendance habits and level of knowledge about the faith vary wildly.

For those reasons, St. Michael’s RCIA team knew that a “one size fits all” approach would not work.

The parish created what it calls different “on ramps” for accessing the RCIA “expressway” throughout the year.

To inspire adults to seek the Sacraments of Initiation or a deeper connection to the Church, St. Michael’s employs a robust social media campaign on its own and local social media sites to continually invite adults to join new online discussion groups.

As part of that campaign, Tina Gregory, St. Michael’s Communication and Adult Enrichment coordinator, has produced a series of “Sacred Stories”—video interviews of parishioners who describe their own conversion stories or faith journeys.

The real stories about real people are evidence that “God is working in people’s lives—right here, right now,” Gregory said.



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A “find out more” call to action at the end of the story often leads seekers to reach out to the parish.

Those who reach out to the parish and indicate the need for sacramental preparation are directed to an online intake form. The intake form goes to the RCIA email address. Those who need to complete their sacraments sit down for a “discernment conversation” with the parish’s parochial vicar. This helps determine what group is the best fit and gives those seeking the sacraments a rough idea of how long the preparation process will take.

Faith seekers and Catholics who have not been regular churchgoers begin with *THE SEARCH*, in which they can reflect on who they are and what they seek. In *The Search Continues*, participants hear Augustine Institute faculty members answer the questions most often posed about the Catholic faith. Others begin with *Lectio: The Case for Jesus*, in which Dr. Brant Pitre explores the Gospels and early writings from Christian and non-Christian sources to explain who Jesus is.

Those ready for RCIA start with *SYMBOLON*—what Gregory described as “the catechism in a video program.”

Those watching *SYMBOLON* meet in small groups once a week. One benefit of *SYMBOLON* is that the program itself contains all of the theological content that candidates need.

“With *SYMBOLON*, you don’t have to train catechists,” Gregory said. “You have to train facilitators or hosts.”

RCIA candidates also join an ongoing weekly gathering, using *OPENING THE WORD* to unpack the Sunday Mass readings.

After *SYMBOLON*, the parish’s RCIA candidates do a deep dive on the Eucharist and Reconciliation with *PRESENCE* and *FORGIVEN*. Participants can also view *Elements of the Catholic Mass*, three- to five-minute videos in which Fr. Douglas Martis explains parts of the Mass that can be confusing, such as what sacramentals are and why Catholics bow while reciting the Nicene Creed.

Throughout the RCIA process, St. Michael’s tries to incorporate those who are in the pre-catechumenate and candidates into parish life and “keep them fed,” Gregory said.

The parish assigns each candidate a sponsor from the parish community. After each meeting, the leader sends out a follow-up email or text. Reminders go out about participating in Adoration or saying a Rosary. Candidates receive regular recommendations about the resources available to them on [formed.org](https://www.formed.org). Group leaders encourage their members to volunteer at the parish’s Community Cares ministry, where those in need can receive free groceries and prayer support from the on-site prayer team.

Once candidates have completed their sacraments or have been received into the Church, the RCIA team poses a question to each one: “Where do you think the Lord is calling you?”

The answer to that question shepherds the new member of the Church into a parish program or ministry for the next part of the faith journey.



To learn more, contact **Brian Truckenbrod**
Senior Director, Parish Channel

brian.truckenbrod@augustineinstitute.org

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