

Christian Initiation of Adults

Rite of Acceptance

Diocese of San José

“You have followed God’s light, and the way of the Gospel now lies open before you.”
Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, 52

Becoming Catholic

Responding to God’s Call

God works in many different ways. Most of the time, God works through ordinary people and events—a parent, a friend, a beautiful sunset, a song, an inspiring story. Other times, we hear God’s call during crisis moments or major life-changes—a birth, an engagement, a sickness, a death. Sometimes, we just have a feeling that something is missing.

No matter what a person’s reasons are for becoming Catholic, the Church’s hope and prayer is that when God calls them, they will respond.

One part of the Catholic Church’s mission is to help people respond to God as best they can. For Christians, initiation and on-going participation in the life of the Church are the primary responses to God’s call. Through the process of becoming Catholic, we try to help people learn how to respond to that call not just for the moment of baptism but for everyday of their lives. The way we learn how to become Catholic is by actually doing what Catholics do. So the process of being initiated into the Church is not so much about learning things as in a classroom but learning a way of life as an apprentice learns a discipline from a master and that master’s community.

God showers his grace on the candidates, since the celebration manifests their desire publicly and marks their first consecration (RCIA 41).

anytime for as long as needed.

When the inquiring person and the Church community believe that the person is starting to

Being Accepted

Becoming Catholic is a process. The Catholic Church has recently recovered and developed a process that some of the earliest Christians had used when people came to them asking to be baptized. The first part of this process is called “Evangelization and Precatechumenate.”

In this initial phase, an unbaptized adult or child over seven is moved by some experience to inquire about the Catholic Church. Through some informal contact with a member of the Church, he or she begins to explore issues of faith, questions they’ve always had about the Church, or anything that has moved them to seek some kind of relationship with the Church. This part of the process can happen

show some signs of a Christian faith and is ready to commit to becoming Catholic, the person is invited to celebrate a ritual called a “Rite of Acceptance into the Order of the Catechumenate.” By celebrating this rite, the person is officially and publicly declaring his or her intention to enter into a formal relationship with the Church, learning its ways and participating in its lifestyle. The Church, in turn, accepts their commitment and pledges its support throughout the person’s journey of faith.

This rite makes the person an official member of the Church as one who is preparing to be baptized. Therefore, the person is given an official title and role to play in the Church, that of “catechumen” which means “one in whom the Word of God echoes.” In preparation for this rite, the Church also gives the inquiring person a gift—one of its own baptized

Words to know

catechesis: Greek, meaning “sounding down” or “re-echoing down to another”; a way of communicating faith

catechumen: Greek, meaning “one in whom word echoes”; one who celebrated the Rite of Acceptance

dismissal: a sending; catechumens are sent after homily to reflect on God’s Word; the baptized are sent at Mass to “go, love and serve the Lord;” not meant to separate but to enable one’s mission

evangelization: first stage of RCIA, of unfixed duration, also called inquiry or pre-catechumenate; proclaiming faith in Christ; mission of the baptized

inquirer: name given to the unbaptized who are drawn to the Christian way of life

RCIA: stands for “Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults;” process for becoming Christian

Rite of Acceptance: first public rite for those becoming Catholic; marks transition from inquiry period to catechumenate period

signing of the senses: ritual act of tracing the sign of the cross on the catechumen’s forehead and other parts of the body during the Rite of Acceptance

Do you remember when you first heard God’s call? Was it through a person or a significant event? What were you being called to do? How did you feel about what you were being called to do? Who helped you take the next step?

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members to be a sponsor or companion of the person through the next part of the process of becoming Catholic called the “Period of the Catechumenate.”

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- What important commitments have you made? How did you symbolize making that commitment? Who supported you in making it?
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The Threshold

The door or threshold of the Church is an important symbol in many Catholic rites. Doors symbolize transitions and new ways of life. For Christians, Christ, the Good Shepherd and the gate for the sheep, is the most important door, because “whoever enters through [Christ] will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture” (John 10:9). But doors are also liminal spaces, in-between places that are neither here nor there. Even though Christ has died and risen to save us from death, we still live in the in-between time until Christ comes again to welcome all of creation through the doors of the kingdom of God.

In the Rite of Acceptance, those wishing to answer God’s call are met at the threshold of the Church by the baptized and are ritually welcomed to enter into the Church’s doors.

The Cross

To enter into Christ also means entering into his dying and rising, for he said, “whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me” (Mark 8:34). Those who answer God’s call will need to learn how to let go and die to their old ways of life, and this will often be painful and difficult. But the cross is also the sign of our salvation. So in the Rite of Acceptance, the Church consecrates—sets apart and makes holy—those who are committing themselves to following Christ by signing their bodies with the cross.

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- Think of all the ways the cross touches you—in the sign of the cross, in crosses you wear. What does the cross mean to you?
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The Word and the Assembly

In order to learn how to take up the cross of Christ each day of their lives, these catechumens will need to be nourished by the Word of God, for “one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). In the Scriptures that they will hear every Sunday in the Mass, God speaks, and in the Gospels, Christ proclaims to all those assembled that God’s promises last forever. No matter what things the catechumens will encounter—suffering, pain, obstacles, doubt, fear, sin, death—God will never leave them. God’s love through Christ never fails.

Where we encounter Christ and his love most clearly is in the assembly. When God’s people gather on Sunday to proclaim the Scriptures, offer prayers for the world, and remember Christ in the sharing of a meal—the Eucharist—Christ is truly present. It will be through the assembly that the catechumens learn how to live as Christ. The assembly models for them how to die to selfishness, how to forgive others, how to preach the Good News, and how to live in hope through the Holy Spirit. The catechumens will depend on the Spirit of God found in the assembly to apprentice them into a life of discipleship.

Because they are not yet baptized, the catechumens cannot yet participate in the prayers of the faithful. These prayers are the Creed, the General Intercessions, and the Eucharistic Prayer which climaxes in Communion. Therefore, after the homily, the catechumens, accompanied by a member of the baptized, are sent to feast on the Word of God, to reflect on how God is continuing to call them in this part of their faith journey, and to discern how they are to respond.

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- What are your favorite Scripture passages? How have these words nourished you? How do you see these words lived out in the assembly? What do these words call you to do?
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Joined to the Church, the catechumens are now part of the household of Christ, since the Church nourishes them with the word of God (RCIA 47).

Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens

(italics show optional parts of the Rite)

Receiving the Candidates

Gathering song
Sign of the Cross and greeting
Procession to the doors of the Church
Greeting the candidates
Opening dialogue asking what they seek
Candidates’ acceptance of the Gospel
Affirmation by sponsors and assembly
and acceptance of the candidates by the Church
Signing of candidates with the cross
Invitation to hear the Word of God
Procession into the Church

Liturgy of the Word

Instruction of the catechumens to prepare them for the Word
First reading
Psalm response
Second reading
Gospel acclamation and Gospel reading
Homily
Presentation of a Bible
Intercessions for the catechumens
Prayer over the catechumens
Dismissal of the catechumens
Liturgy of the Eucharist