

Becoming Catholic

The Catechumenate

Unbaptized persons in the catechumenate are called “catechumens.” The catechumenate provides a structure for the proclamation of the Gospel, catechesis (the passing on of the teachings of the church), public and private prayer, spiritual direction, the observance of the feasts, fasts, Sundays and seasons of the Church calendar, direct contact with members of the parish community and participation in the work of the Church for justice and peace. During this time, each catechumen and candidate is paired with a sponsor who can serve as a spiritual companion and offer support and encouragement.

Through the various rites of the catechumenate, the Church marks a person’s journey to full membership. These rites reflect his or her spiritual growth and the community’s loving concern. The climax of the catechumenate process is the celebration of the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil, followed by a period for reflection on the sacraments and for integration into the life and mission of the Church.

The periods for Christian Initiation include the following:

- **Period of Inquiry:** This is a time of introduction to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and a time of reflection on one’s own life in light of the values of the reign of God. It is an unstructured time of no fixed duration for questions, and an opportunity for the beginnings of Christian faith to form.
- **Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens:** In this liturgical rite, those who wish to become catechumens publicly express their desire to follow the way of Jesus. The Church accepts their intention and welcomes them into the household of faith as catechumens.
- **Period of the Catechumenate:** Along with the whole community, catechumens celebrate the Liturgy of the Word at Mass each Sunday. After the homily, the catechumens and their catechists (teachers) continue to study and ponder the scriptures and the teachings of the Church. During this time, catechumens learn about the Catholic faith through prayer, learning about the Church, and coming to know other Catholic Christians. During this period, they discover the love and power of God in their lives and in the Church.
- **Election or Enrollment of Names:** At this liturgical rite, usually celebrated on the First Sunday of Lent in the cathedral of the diocese, the bishop formally acknowledges the readiness of the catechumens and candidates and calls them to the Sacraments of Initiation. The catechumens and candidates respond by expressing their desire for these sacraments. From this time, until they are baptized, the catechumens are now known as the elect.
- **Period of Purification and Enlightenment:** This time of intense preparation for initiates usually coincides with Lent. During this period, the elect and the parish community

together focus on conversion, scrutinize their lives in light of the Gospel, and celebrate the presentations of the Creed and Lord's Prayer.

- Sacraments of Initiation: The elect become full members of the Body of Christ, the Church, through the celebration of the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil. From this time, until the end of the period of Mystagogy, they are known as neophytes, "new sprouts." Candidates are welcomed as full members of the Body of Christ through the celebration of Confirmation and Eucharist at Easter Vigil and continue with the neophytes into the next period of Mystagogy.
- Period of Mystagogy: During the fifty days season of Easter, neophytes and candidates ponder the experience and meaning of the sacraments and participate with the faithful in the Eucharistic life of the Church and its mission for justice and peace. Formation and teaching continue through this period to help the neophytes and candidates become incorporated into the full life of the Christian community.