

Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA)

The Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA) is the Church's liturgical and pastoral framework for welcoming adults into full communion with the Catholic Church. It is organized as a pastoral process shaped by a series of public rites that mark conversion, formation, and reception.

- Inquiry
- Catechumenate
- Purification & Enlightenment
- Sacraments
- Mystagogy

Inquiry (Pre-Catechumenate) — This is an informal period of evangelization and initial discernment in which seekers hear the Gospel, ask questions, and begin Christian conversion in a noncommittal way. It is pastoral rather than strictly liturgical, intended to foster openness to further formation and to identify those who are ready to enter the catechumenate. The community's hospitality and catechetical accompaniment are primary.

Rite of Acceptance (for Catechumens) — The Rite of Acceptance is the first public liturgical act for the unbaptized who wish to follow Christ. In this rite the inquirer declares intention before the community, is accepted as a *catechumen*, and is signed with a cross to symbolize initial conversion and belonging to the Church. This rite formally integrates the person into the process of formation and marks the beginning of the catechumenate.

Rite of Welcoming (for Candidates) — For those already validly baptized in another Christian tradition, the Rite of Welcoming publicly recognizes them as *candidates* preparing for reception into full communion (Confirmation and Eucharist). The rite emphasizes their baptismal identity while enrolling them in the parish's preparation, assisted by sponsors and pastoral leaders.

Catechumenate — A sustained period of catechesis, prayer, liturgical formation, and community integration. Catechumens receive instruction in Scripture, doctrine, and Christian living and are accompanied by sponsors. The parish shapes rites, rites of dismissal (optional), and ongoing pastoral care that steadily prepare the catechumens for election and for the sacraments.

Rite of Sending — When the parish judges catechumens ready, it celebrates a Rite of Sending (often on a Sunday) to commend them to the local bishop. It is usually celebrated at a Sunday Mass. Catechumens are asked to affirm their desire for the sacraments; sponsors and the community testify to their readiness. The rite concludes with a prayer of sending and blessing.

Rite of Election (at the Cathedral) — Presided over by the bishop, the Rite of Election calls the catechumens to the sacraments at Easter and records their names in the Book of the Elect. The rite affirms their conversion, the community's support, and the Church's prayerful expectation of their initiation. It is the canonical moment when catechumens become the *elect*.

Period of Purification and Enlightenment — A Lent-time season centered on interior conversion, intensified prayer, and spiritual preparation rather than new instruction. For

catechumens (the elect) this period includes three **Scrutinies**, and for candidates a **Penitential Rite**.

Penitential Rite (for Candidates) — Celebrated typically in Lent (commonly the 2nd Sunday), this liturgy focuses on the baptized candidate's deepened conversion and reconciliation with God and the Church. The community prays over candidates, invoking God's mercy and strengthening their resolve to live as faithful disciples. Candidates are also assisted toward sacramental confession before reception. The rite highlights that candidates, even though baptized, require ongoing conversion and communal support.

First, Second, Third Scrutiny (for Catechumens/Elect) — The three Scrutinies (traditionally on the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Sundays of Lent) are rites of examination, prayer, and exorcism intended to heal the elect's spiritual weaknesses and to strengthen them against sin. Each scrutiny includes scripture, intercessions, and prayers that ask God to lead the elect into the fullness of new life in Christ, preparing them for Baptism at the Easter Vigil.

Easter Vigil: Sacraments of Initiation — At the Easter Vigil the elect receive the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. This is the sacramental culmination of the OCIA journey and the entry of neophytes into full sacramental life of the Church.

Candidate Mass (2nd Sunday of Easter): Candidates make a profession of faith, are confirmed, and receive Communion. This is the sacramental culmination of the OCIA journey for the Candidates and their entry into full communion with the Church.

Sacramental Mass: Those who are already baptized Catholics receive the Sacrament of Confirmation within the context of the Eucharist. The newly confirmed participate fully in the Eucharist, receiving Holy Communion as a completion of their initiation. This rite highlights both their personal strengthening by the Spirit and their incorporation into the mission and sacramental life of the Church.

Mystagogy (Easter Season and Beyond) — The period after initiation (at least through Pentecost) in which the neophytes, those received into full communion with the Catholic Church, and Catholics who have been confirmed are all invited to deepen their understanding of the sacraments they have received and to grow more fully into the life of the Church. This stage emphasizes ongoing conversion, integration into parish life, and active participation in the Church's mission, so that the newly initiated and confirmed may live out their baptismal call with maturity, witness, and service.