

THE
SEEKERS
FORUM



PERIOD OF EVANGELIZATION AND PRECATECHUMENATE

*I, the light, have come into the world, so that whoever believes in me
need not remain in the dark anymore*

- 36 Although the rite of initiation begins with admission to the catechumenate, the preceding period or precatechumenate is of great importance and as a rule should not be omitted. It is a time of evangelization: faithfully and constantly the living God is proclaimed and Jesus Christ whom he has sent for the salvation of all. Thus those who are not yet Christians, their hearts opened by the Holy Spirit, may believe and be freely converted to the Lord and commit themselves sincerely to him. For he who is the way, the truth, and the life fulfils all their spiritual expectations, indeed infinitely surpasses them.¹ [9]
- 37 From evangelization, completed with the help of God, come the faith and initial conversion that cause a person to feel called away from sin and drawn into the mystery of God's love. The whole period of the precatechumenate is set aside for this evangelization, so that the genuine will to follow Christ and seek baptism may mature. [10]
- 38 During this period, priests and deacons, catechists and other laypersons are to give the candidates a suitable explanation of the Gospel (see no. 42). The candidates are to receive help and attention so that with a purified and clearer intention they may cooperate with God's grace. Opportunities should be provided for them to meet families and other groups of Christians. [11]
- 39 It belongs to the conference of bishops to provide for the evangelization proper to this period. The conference may also provide, if circumstances suggest and in keeping with local custom, a preliminary manner of receiving those interested in the precatechumenate, that is, those inquirers who, even though they do not fully believe, show some leaning toward the Christian faith (and who may be called 'sympathisers').
1. Such a reception, if it takes place, will be carried out without any ritual celebration; it is the expression not yet of faith, but of a right intention.
 2. The reception will be adapted to local conditions and to the pastoral situation. Some candidates may need to see evidence of the spirit of Christians that they are striving to understand and experience. For others, however, whose catechumenate will be delayed for one reason or another, some initial act of the candidates or the community that expresses their reception may be appropriate.
 3. The reception will be held at a meeting or gathering of the local community, on an occasion that will permit friendly conversation. An inquirer or 'sympathiser' is introduced by a friend and then welcomed and received by the priest or some other representative member of the community. [12]
- 40 During the precatechumenate period, parish priests (pastors) should help those taking part in it with prayers suited to them, for example, by celebrating for their spiritual well-being the prayers of exorcism and the blessings given in the ritual (nos. 94, 97). [13, 111, 120]

I See Vatican Council II, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad gentes*, no. 13.

FIRST STEP: ACCEPTANCE INTO THE ORDER OF CATECHUMENS

Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you

- 41 The rite that is called the rite of acceptance into the order of catechumens is of the utmost importance. Assembling publicly for the first time, the candidates who have completed the period of the precatechumenate declare their intention to the Church and the Church in turn, carrying out its apostolic mission, accepts them as persons who intend to become its members. God showers his grace on the candidates, since the celebration manifests their desire publicly and marks their reception and first consecration by the Church. [14, 15, 68]
- 42 The prerequisite for making this first step is that the beginnings of the spiritual life and the fundamentals of Christian teaching have taken root in the candidates.¹ Thus there must be evidence of the first faith that was conceived during the period of evangelization and precatechumenate and of an initial conversion and intention to change their lives and to enter into a relationship with God in Christ. Consequently, there must also be evidence of the first stirrings of repentance, a start to the practice of calling upon God in prayer, a sense of the Church, and some experience of the company and spirit of Christians through contact with a priest or with members of the community. The candidate should also be instructed about the celebration of the liturgical rite of acceptance. [15, 68]
- 43 Before the rite is celebrated, therefore, sufficient and necessary time, as required in each case, should be set aside to evaluate and, if necessary, to purify the candidates' motives and dispositions. With the help of the sponsors (see no. 10), catechists, and deacons, parish priests (pastors) have the responsibility for judging the outward indications of such dispositions.² Because of the effect of baptism once validly received (see Christian Initiation, General Introduction, no. 4), it is the duty of parish priests (pastors) to see to it that no baptised person seeks for any reason whatever to be baptised a second time. [15, 69]
- 44 The rite will take place on specified days during the year (see no. 18) that are suited to local conditions. The rite consists in the reception of the candidates, the celebration of the word of God, and the dismissal of the candidates; celebration of the eucharist may follow. By decision of the conference of bishops, the following may be incorporated into this rite: a first exorcism and renunciation of false worship (nos. 70-72), the giving of a new name (no. 73), and additional rites signifying reception into the community (no. 74). [65, 69, 72]
- 45 It is desirable that the entire Christian community or some part of it, consisting of friends and acquaintances, catechists and priests, take an active part in the celebration. The presiding celebrant is a priest or a deacon. The sponsors should also attend in order to present to the Church the candidates they have brought. [70, 71]
- 46 After the celebration of the rite of acceptance, the names of the catechumens are to be duly inscribed in the register of catechumens, along with the names of the sponsors and the minister and the date and place of the celebration. [17]
- 47 From this time on the Church embraces the catechumens as its own with a mother's love and concern. Joined to the Church, the catechumens are now part of the household of Christ,³ since the Church nourishes them with the word of God and sustains them by means of liturgical celebrations. The catechumens should be eager, then, to take part in



“and he went to his home glorifying God!”
Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:18-26



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Telling Others About Jesus

1. **Be Holy.** Notice the Lord. Know the Lord. Seek to think, judge, act and hope like Jesus in your life—prayer, precepts, beatitudes. Love the Lord. Share your faith and your joy will be complete (1 Cor 11:1, Eph 5:1-20, 1 Jn 1:1-4).

2. **Look Around You.** Who are the people in your life? Family, friends, acquaintances (work, shop, neighbors, school, gym, events, etc.). No meeting is merely coincidental. Could you be the one called to tell them about the Lord? To invite them to Church? To share your faith? Always be ready to tell of your hope (Phil 2:1-11, 1 Pt 3:15)

Write the names of those who come to mind.

3. **Prayer and Fasting.** Pray for those on your list (and anyone else you encounter) for a readiness to hear about the Lord. Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you and stir up any gifts and words you need to share the faith (Phil 1:12; Acts 13-14).

4. **Friendship.** Express an interest in people. Get to know them. Develop a friendship. Be a witness.

5. **Invitation / Sharing.** You have to ask / share the faith. How can others hear unless someone tells them? (Rm 10:14) "Wordless witness always remains insufficient" (St. Pope Paul VI). "Woe to me" if I do not share the faith (1 Cor 9:16-17).

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Adult Inquirer Information Form

Information on this form is held in confidence and is not shared without your permission.

Today's Date: _____

Name: First: _____ Middle: _____ Last: _____

Maiden Name (if applicable): _____

Date of Birth: _____ Age: _____

Place of Birth: _____
(include **locality** (town, city, county, etc.), **region** (state, province, territory, etc.), and **country**)

Name of Father: _____

Name of Mother: _____

I. CONTACT INFORMATION

Full Mailing Address: _____

Phone: (Daytime) _____ (Evening/Weekend) _____

Cell/Mobile Phone: _____ Occupation: _____

Email: (Home) _____ (Other) _____

II. RELIGIOUS HISTORY

1. What, if any, is your present religious affiliation? _____

2. Have you ever been baptized? Yes No I am not sure

If you answered "Yes" to Question 2, please provide the following information:

(a) In what denomination were you baptized? _____

(b) Date or your approximate age when you were baptized: _____

(c) Baptismal name (if different from current name): _____

(d) Place of Baptism (name of church/denomination): _____

(e) Address, if known: _____

(f) Location, if known: _____

(include **locality** (town, city, county, etc.), **region** (state, province, territory, etc.), and **country**)

3. If you were baptized as a Catholic, check those sacraments you have already received:

Penance (Confession) Eucharist (First Communion) Confirmation

III. CURRENT MARITAL STATUS

Check the appropriate statement(s) below and provide any information requested beneath each statement.

1. I have never been married.

2. I am engaged to be married.

(a) Your Fiancé(e)'s Name: _____

(b) Your Fiancé(e)'s Current Religious Affiliation (if any): _____

(c) For you: This is my first marriage. I have been married before.

(d) For your fiancé(e): This is his/her first marriage. My fiancé(e) has been married before.

3. I am married.

(a) Your Spouse's Name: _____

(b) Your Spouse's Current Religious Affiliation (if any): _____

(c) For you: This is my first marriage. I have been married before.

(d) For your spouse: This is my spouse's first marriage. My spouse has been married before.

(e) Date of Marriage: _____

(f) Place of Marriage: _____
(include **locality** (town, city, county, etc.), **region** (state, province, territory, etc.), and **country**)

(g) Officiating Authority of Marriage: _____
(civil government, non-Christian minister, Christian minister, Catholic cleric)

4. I am married, but separated from my spouse.

5. I am divorced and I have not remarried.

6. I am a widow/widower and have not remarried since my spouse's death.

IV. FAMILY INFORMATION

List the name(s) of any children or other dependents (e.g., Daughter—Jane; Stepson—John).

Relationship: _____ Name: _____ Age: _____

Relationship: _____ Name: _____ Age: _____

Relationship: _____ Name: _____ Age: _____

Relationship: _____ Name: _____ Age: _____

Relationship: _____ Name: _____ Age: _____

V. GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. What or who has led you to want to know more about the Catholic Faith?

2. Please describe the types of religious education you have received, as a child and as an adult.

3. What contact have you had with the Catholic Church to date?

4. What are some of the questions or concerns you have about the Catholic Church?

5. At this point in time, which of the following statements best describes your present feelings and thoughts about the possibility of joining the Catholic Church? (please circle one)

- A. I need much more information about the Catholic Church before I would consider joining.
- B. I am considering joining, but I am still unsure about it.
- C. I am fairly sure that I would like to join, but I still need some time to study and pray about it.
- D. I am fairly sure that I want to join the Catholic Church.



During this time those inquiring are introduced to the parish through a microcosm of the Church that is the initiation team. Here they meet Christians strong in faith, hope, and charity who widen the "tent pegs" of their hearts and lives to welcome all who would "come and see."

The Period of Evangelization & Precatechumenate

(Teaching to the Rites: see RCIA 52 and 511)

The Gospel message ~ Christ-centered, Trinitarian, ecclesial, personal, and forward-looking (founded in hope):

- ✦ God is our Creator and in him all things have their existence
- ✦ God gives light to everyone who comes into this world, revealing himself through his works, so that all may learn to give thanks
- ✦ The Father has sent his faithful witness, Jesus Christ, to announce to us what he has seen and heard, the mysteries of Heaven and earth
- ✦ This is eternal life: to know the one true God and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent; the Trinity is our destiny and model of perfect love
- ✦ Jesus Christ has made the way for us to take advantage of that plan by his Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension into Heaven
- ✦ The Holy Spirit makes it possible to access the full power and merits won for us by Jesus in the Church, which dispenses them in the sanctifying action of the sacramental life, enabling us to make the mind of Christ our own, to love God and neighbor in holiness
- ✦ The Catholics of this parish family warmly invite you to come and see our life and with us to enter into full communion with Christ

The primary and most effective means of communicating these truths are:

- ✦ The witness of the individual living in accordance with the Gospel message
- ✦ The witness of the Christian community as the kingdom of God on earth

The Catechetical components of this period are:

- ✦ The Gospel expressed carefully and completely, by means of testimonies and explanation of Scripture
- ✦ Answers given to the most pressing and obvious questions of the inquirers
- ✦ Teachings which adequately prepare them for the first major Rites and content of the process, and the living of a daily Catholic life of believing, hoping, and loving (faith, hope, and charity)
- ✦ The Christian community modeled in the microcosm of the team, and a gradual introduction into works of charity

In justice, great care must be taken that the most troubling or difficult questions get answered for each inquirer, so that here will be no surprises after the commitment is made in the first Rites.



Catechesis in the Precatechumenate: Delivering the Gospel

From evangelization, completed with the help of God, come the faith and initial conversion that cause a person to feel called away from sin and drawn into the mystery of God's love. The whole period of the pre-catechumenate is set aside for this evangelization, so that the genuine will to follow Christ and seek Baptism may mature. (RCIA 37)

THE ELEMENTS OF THE PRECATECHUMENATE ARE:

- ✦ A suitable proclamation of the Gospel (see Mark 1:15)
- ✦ The truth of the message of the Gospel communicated by testimonies and explanation of Scripture (see RCIA 38)
- ✦ Answers given to questions of the inquirers in the form of apologetics (see RCIA 38)
- ✦ Teaching that adequately prepares inquirers for the first major Rites (see RCIA 42)
- ✦ A time of first faith, continuing conversion, and desire for the sacraments (see RCIA 42, 43)
- ✦ Christian community lived out with the team, and in the context of a welcoming parish (see RCIA 38, 45)

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?



- ⊕ The Good News about God and his wonderful works
- ⊕ The Good News about his love and his plan for us
- ⊕ It must be:
 - ✦ TRINITARIAN: He, who 'was sent by the Father' and 'anointed by the Spirit', is Lord, Messiah, and Savior, and the Son of God and Son of Mary (GDC 99-100)
 - ✦ CHRIST-CENTERED: Through the saving action of his passion, death, resurrection, and ascension into Heaven (the Paschal mystery), he has made a way for us to take advantage of the Father's plan for our salvation (John 14:6; GDC 98)
 - ✦ ECCLESIAL: While on earth, he went about doing good and preaching the Kingdom of God, which he perpetuated in a visible Church (Ephesians 3:10; see CCC 760)
 - ✦ PERSONAL: The Holy Spirit has made it possible for us to access in the Church the full power and merits won for us by Jesus, which dispenses them in the sanctifying action of the sacramental life (see GDC 43, 117)
 - ✦ FORWARD-LOOKING: He ascended to the Father to prepare a place for his people who have been freed from sin and taken into the family of God (John 14:1-7)
 - ✦ HEAVEN-FOCUSED: His family will endure the judgment that is to come and will enjoy his 'steadfast love that endures forever' in the Heavenly banquet; the Father's plan for our salvation is for us to "become partakers of the Divine nature" (2 Peter 1:3-4)
 - ✦ EXPERIENCED IN THIS COMMUNITY: The Catholics of this parish family warmly invite you to come and see our life and with us to enter into full communion with Christ and participate in the Father's plan (GDC 102, 256)

ELEMENTS OF THE GOSPEL:

- ⊕ Revelation
- ⊕ Our Sin Problem
- ⊕ Salvation
- ⊕ Scripture
- ⊕ The Church as necessary for salvation
- ⊕ The Christian life: believing, hoping, loving
- ⊕ Jesus



Apologetics in the Precatechumenate: Speaking the Truth in Love

In the presentation of the Christian religion, catechesis must deal with the many questions, difficulties, and doubts which arise in the human heart. Indeed, these questions should be brought to light when they have been obscured or confused by ignorance or indifference. The faith response to these questions will appear meaningful if it is rooted in the Bible and in concrete historical life, and if it is respectful of reason and attentive to the signs of the times. (ACCC 48)

USE OF APOLOGETICS IN THE PRECATECHUMENATE

- ✦ Inquiry, not challenge
- ✦ Primarily presentation of principles, not refutation of hostile arguments
- ✦ Hotly debated topics are not answered simply

PRINCIPAL TECHNIQUES

- ✦ Prompt for Questions:
 - ✦ **Ask for them**; welcome and encourage questions—even repeatedly—draw them out
 - ✦ **Give a list** and let people pick their favorites
 - ✦ **Provide blanks** for submitting questions
 - ✦ Consider **answering important questions** not asked
- ✦ Answer Questions:
 - ✦ **Restate** the question so all hear exactly what you are answering and the questioner knows you heard the question correctly
 - ✦ Explain Catholic beliefs **simply and clearly**—this is key
 - ✦ Answer **accurately**—if you're not sure, admit it, then look it up
 - ✦ Answer **respectfully and non-defensively**
 - ✦ Rely on **Scripture, Tradition, the Magisterium, liturgy, and reason**
 - ✦ Answer **practically** with real life application in mind
 - ✦ Answer **immediately**, or give good reason for necessary delay (inquirers may not be there 'later')
 - ✦ Answer **cheerfully, tirelessly, and patiently**
 - ✦ Ask for further questions did you answer the question **adequately for them**

IMPORTANCE OF OVERCOMING

AN OVERLY APOLOGETIC APPROACH TO DOCTRINE

- ✦ The aesthetic aspect of doctrine in catechesis—God's revelation of truth is deeply beautiful
- ✦ The organic, systematic nature of doctrine in catechesis—belief is a totality, not a collection of doctrines (pattern, not a pile)
- ✦ The glory of the Lord as expressed in catechesis
- ✦ The truths of the faith are a way of life, not just a way of thinking

PREPARATION FOR CATECHISTS

- ⊕ Prayer: "As much time before the Blessed Sacrament as on the platform." (Frank Sheed)
- ⊕ Doctrine as an organic reality—we teach the paradigm of love given and love returned (see John 15:9-12)
- ⊕ Scripture, the Magisterium, Church history
- ⊕ Sound reasoning: read, listen, practice
- ⊕ Knowledge of the primary points of the most common belief systems

A catechist can deal with tough questions if the inquirers are led to see that the Church is about expressing God's love—this gives them a paradigm, a lens, a background for seeing and processing the world. (see 1 John 4:7-12)



What Shall we do in Inquiry/ Precatechumenate Gatherings?

Continually hook everything to the Story of the wonderful works of God and his plan for us.

Help inquirers understand how to navigate the Bible.

Soak each session in Scripture in order to guide and to apply Revelation to real life.

Sing hymn which can be learned easily and which express a seeking for God.

Teach prayer and model it. Pray individually with inquirers. Pray as a group using different prayer forms.

- ✠ Intercessions
- ✠ Psalms
- ✠ Basic Catholic prayers
- ✠ Spontaneous prayer

Give personal testimony to God's love, his faithfulness and his family, the Church.

- ✠ Catechists/clergy/team/godparents/sponsors
- ✠ Neophytes/other parishioners

Show how we can know that God exists.

- ⇔ Through reason alone man can know *that* God exists.
- ⇔ From Revelation however, man can know *who* God is.

Introduce inquirers to Jesus using Scriptural images which reveal different aspects about him.

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| ✠ Jesus the Good Shepherd | ✠ Jesus the Son of God |
| ✠ Jesus the Savior | ✠ Jesus the King |
| ✠ Jesus the God-Man | ✠ Jesus the High Priest |
| ✠ Jesus the Teacher | ✠ Jesus the Way for us |
| ✠ Jesus the Son of Mary | ✠ Jesus the Truth for us |
| ✠ Jesus the Redeemer | ✠ Jesus the Life for us |

Offer a library of basic books, pamphlets, tapes, and videos for people to use.

Offer a tour of the church and sacristy.

Encourage inquirers to ask questions, and answer them in an apologetic form (in order to remove “stumbling blocks”).

Make sure that there is time for silent reflection. Make sure that there is time for sharing between inquirers and team/godparents/sponsors/clergy.

Provide the opportunity for friendships to begin.

The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for: The dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God. This invitation to converse with God is addressed to man as soon as he comes into being. For if man exists it is because God has created him through love, and through love continues to hold him in existence. He cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and entrusts himself to his Creator. (CCC 27)



Giving a Personal Testimony (Witness) in an RCIA Setting

And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

~ 1 John 5:11

The Importance of a Testimony

A testimony is a verbal sharing that describes a conversion to Jesus and his Church that happened through the action of grace. A testimony allows inquirers and participants to hear and see how conversion of heart takes place and how to enter the mystery of Christ and to join his Church. For inquirers and participants who do not have a strong relationship with Christ, or who may have limited experience of authentic Christian witness, fellowship, and service, the RCIA team needs to demonstrate what those realities are like. Otherwise, how will inquirers and participants know what they are called by God to be? How will they know what it looks like to respond to that calling and to try to live as a disciple of Christ?

There are three ways in which this calling and this response can be demonstrated:

- 1) Teaching the life of Christ as the model *par excellence*.
- 2) Teaching the lives of saints for the purpose of showing that Christ can be followed successfully in every era, every age-level, and every state of life.
- 3) Teaching your life to them, within the context of how you have heard, responded to, and are striving to live out the very personal call to holiness that the grace of the Holy Spirit makes possible.

This last point is the purpose of a testimony.

The Purposes of a Testimony

A testimony is valuable to the work of conversion in the RCIA process for these reasons:

- ✦ It *removes misconceptions and barriers to relationships*: When inquirers and participants begin coming to sessions, they normally do not know members of the team, and cannot know what kind of person you are and what you think of them. Perhaps they wonder if you are a know-it-all, or the opposite — someone who knows little about Christ and the Bible. Perhaps they think you are there “just to do a job,” or to make the group larger, or to learn more about the Catholic faith yourself without any direct interest in them. They might wonder what you think of non-Catholics, or if you are judgmental. Done well, a testimony allows inquirers and participants to become knowledgeable about you, which may not otherwise occur quickly, or occur at all, in casual conversation. After you have given your testimony, their ability to relate to you is greatly increased, because you have given them “keys” to entering a relationship with you as a follower of Christ. Your testimony clears up misconceptions by communicating your humility, your joy at their presence in the RCIA process, your intention to serve them, and your desire to love them and have fellowship with them. The ice is broken. Instead of conversations and small-group sessions that are awkward and superficial, inquirers and participants can be at ease with you and are more likely to open their hearts to you.
- ✦ It *models conversion*: Inquirers and participants need to have others demonstrate what it would look like to turn one’s life away from sin and towards Christ and his Church. They may be aware of many poor examples of weak, lukewarm Catholicism that could be interpreted as the norm, unless countered by team members who give a more faithful witness to a life converted to Christ. Your testimony should reveal you as a real person, imperfect and struggling with sin, yet serious about sinning less and less, and seeking holiness, confident that God not only desires this, but will make it possible to any soul that seeks honestly to know and do his will.

What to Do

- Ask the Holy Spirit to inspire you to say only that which he wants you to say.
- Speak clearly; make eye contact.
- Be sure to speak to inquirers and participants, not to other team members; it is very easy to unconsciously default to speaking towards those you are most familiar with in the room.
- Consider practicing your testimony, perhaps in front of a mirror.
- Consider having a note card or a very simple outline on a sheet to remind you of the points you want to make.
- Be brief; generally between five and, at most, fifteen minutes is normal for a testimony in an RCIA setting.
- Know what you are going to say and what you hope to achieve.
- A possible outline could be:
 - ✎ Begin with an interesting story.
 - ✎ Describe your early faith life, to the degree that you were distant from, or not as close as you are now, to God and the Catholic Church.
 - ✎ Tell the story of how and why this changed, perhaps gradually or suddenly, in your life.
 - ✎ Explain what difference a relationship with Jesus and Holy Mother Church has made in your life.
 - ✎ Conclude with a thought-provoking comment, question, or loving challenge to those present.Keep in mind that a testimony is often a powerful way to help others think about what God and the Church are asking of them and offering to them.
- Allow inquirers and participants to see your joy in the Lord and your love for his Church.

What to Avoid

- ✎ Do not give a biography of your life; although it is important to you. In a testimony only that which is relevant to how you came to love Jesus and his Church should be included, so every detail you include must in some way serve this purpose.
- ✎ Do not use Catholic terminology or phrases that would be unfamiliar to inquirers and participants.
- ✎ Do not exaggerate elements of your story, or downplay things out of a false sense of humility.
- ✎ Do not be negative about other people or other religious organizations; a testimony is about hope and your thankfulness for God's mercies.
- ✎ Do not read your testimony from a pre-written text; this is your story, to simply be told from the heart.
- ✎ Do not speak condescendingly to inquirers and participants, or give a lecture; you are giving a testimony, not a teaching.
- ✎ Do not be afraid; the focus is not on you, but on the works of God in your life.

Questions to Help You Consider the Content of Your Testimony

Reflect on some or all of these questions to help you identify the "wonderful works of God" in your life:

- What prompted me to respond to God's grace?
- How have I found joy in the Lord and in his Church?
- When have I experienced the peace which surpasses understanding (through the Church)?
- How have I experienced my heart being softened by Jesus (through his Church)?
- How has my mind been changed by Christ and the Church?
- How have I grown in virtue through Jesus and the Church?
- What other blessings have I received from the Lord and his Church?
- What difference has the Holy Spirit made in my life?
- How have I loved those who are difficult for me to love?
- What are some things I am thankful to God for (to his Church for)?

"The most precious gift that the Church can offer the bewildered and restless world of our time is to form within it Christians who are confirmed in what is essential and who are humbly joyful in their faith" (Guide for Catechists 8).

Entrance into the Mystery of Christ

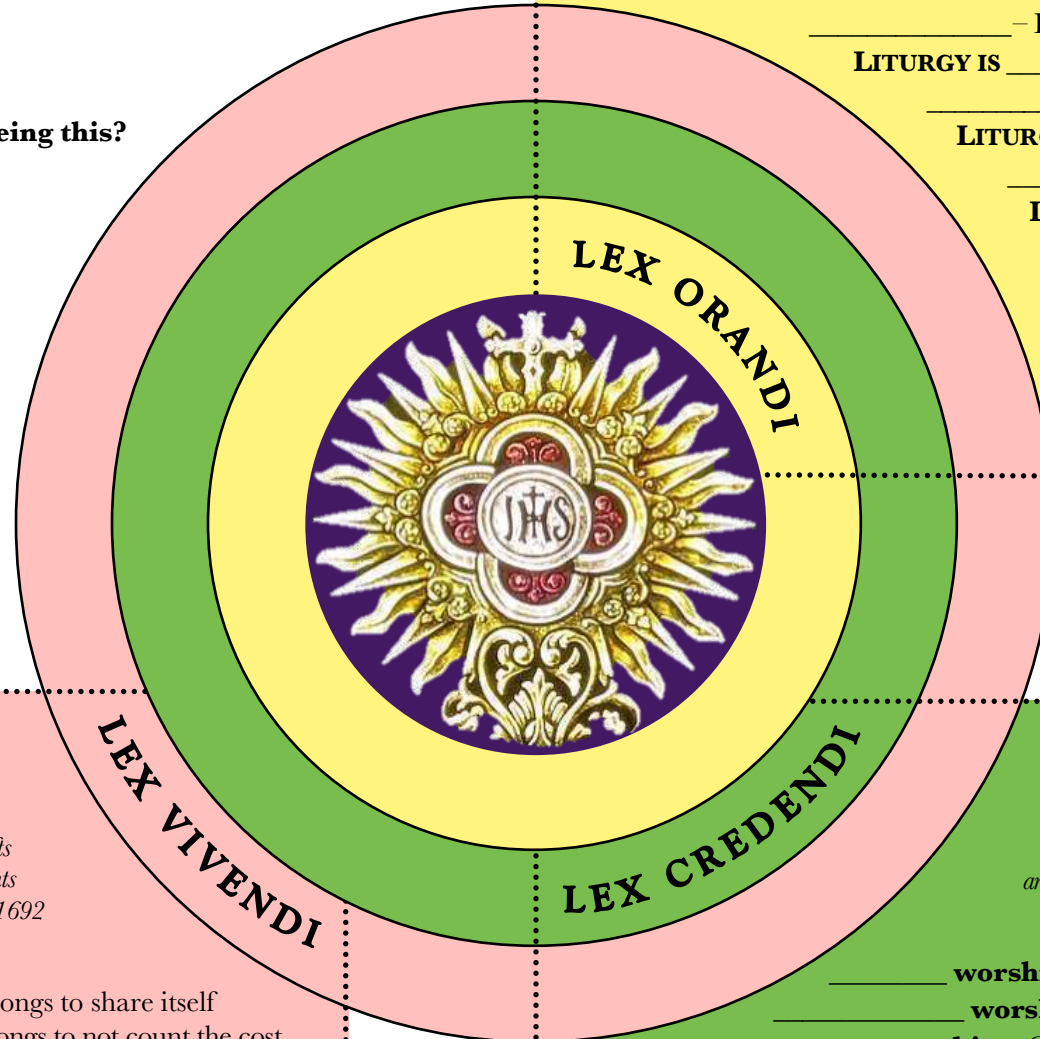
FIRST ORDER QUESTIONS:

1) What's the Point?

2) What is Liturgy?

3) What are common errors in seeing this?

- ⬆ Diabolical division between liturgists and catechists in the parish.
- ⬆ Liturgy is 'used,' becoming the servant of catechesis.
- ⬆ Liturgy does not determine your catechetical emphasis.
- ⬆ No books near you, means no exploration of liturgy.
- ⬆ Thinking that people have sufficiently-sticking conversions through teaching only; no vision that prayer and liturgy are the glue of conversion; they stick you to God.



Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours.
God thirsts that we may thirst for him. ~ CCC 2560

LITURGY IS _____ MADE PRESENT

_____ – The living memory of the Church

LITURGY IS _____ MADE PRESENT

_____ – Rich, concise expression of fidelity and focus

LITURGY IS _____ MADE PRESENT

_____ – Sanctifies time; constant prayer

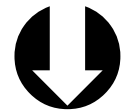
LITURGY IS _____ MADE PRESENT

_____ – Making God's love audible

LITURGY IS _____ MADE PRESENT

_____ – Making God's love edible

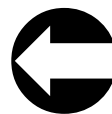
In the liturgy, all Christian prayer finds its source and goal. ~ CCC 1073



Coming to see in the faith their new dignity, Christians are called to lead henceforth a life "worthy of the gospel of Christ." They are made capable of doing so by the grace of Christ and the gifts of his Spirit, which they receive through the sacraments and through prayer. ~ CCC 1692

- Liturgy models _____ – Love longs to share itself
- Liturgy models _____ – Love longs to not count the cost
- Liturgy models _____ – Love longs to trust absolutely
- Liturgy models _____ – Love longs to speak to the beloved

Firm and well-thought-out convictions lead to courageous and upright action. ~ CT 22



Through an utterly free decision, God has revealed himself and given himself to man... By revealing himself God wishes to make them capable of responding to him, and of knowing him, and of loving him far beyond their own natural capacity. ~ CCC 50, 52

- _____ **worship** – Gives a first exposure to sacred space
- _____ **worship** – Explains signs, gestures, and beauty
- _____ **worship** – Offers a compelling vision into the mystery
- _____ **worship** – Bestows orthodoxy, authenticated by Mother Church
- _____ **worship** – Points all doctrine to the Story and to the love that never ends

Catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity. ~ CT 23

SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

IDEAS THAT HELP INCORPORATE LITURGICAL OR PARA-LITURGICAL ASPECTS IN THE WORK OF PASSING ON THE CATHOLIC FAITH

Suggestions for different subjects for guided meditations:

- Guided meditation on the prayers of the RCIA major Rites
- Guided meditation on the prayers of the Baptismal Rite
- Guided meditation on the prayers of the Confirmation Rite
- Guided meditation on the prayers of the Penitential Rite
- Guided meditation on the prayers of each of the Scrutinies
- Guided meditation on specific Gospel stories, on the Psalms, Wisdom Books, or other passages in Scripture
- Guided meditation on the Creed
- Guided meditation on one of the Eucharistic Prayers
- Guided meditation on other major prayers of the Mass (e.g. the Confiteor, the Gloria, the Sanctus, the Agnus Dei, the Communion Rite, etc.)
- Guided meditation on the Divine Praises, or other litanies
- Guided meditation on the Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary, or well-known prayers
- Guided meditation on the verses of hymns

Suggestions for places to visit and tour:

- ◇ The parish church
- ◇ The parish sacristy
- ◇ The diocesan cathedral
- ◇ A monastery or a retreat house
- ◇ A local shrine or other Catholic worship site
- ◇ An Eastern Rite Catholic church
- ◇ A local Catholic historical site
- ◇ A large or very old Catholic cemetery

Suggestions for different prayer forms:

- ▲ Adoration
- ▲ Liturgy of the Word (according to various themes)
- ▲ Silent prayer time alone
- ▲ Silent prayer time in an outdoor setting
- ▲ Silent prayer time in small groups
- ▲ Silent prayer time in a church or chapel
- ▲ Explain and offer Masses for various intentions
- ▲ Explain and pray formal *Lectio Divina*
- ▲ Explain and pray the Liturgy of the Hours
- ▲ Explain and pray the rosary
- ▲ Explain and pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet
- ▲ Explain and pray the Stations of the Cross
- ▲ Explain and pray the Stations of Light
- ▲ Explain and pray the Angelus or Regina Caeli
- ▲ Explain and pray a litany

An exercise in liturgical catechesis:

Take five common doctrines, and come up with (in a single sentence for each) an ear-catching proclamation of how each doctrine connects to the sacred liturgy. Do not limit this to articulating connections to the Mass only, but also the broader liturgical reality that the Church understands.

- ▲ Explain and pray by laying on hands
- ▲ Explain and begin a novena for a specific intention
- ▲ Explain and pray a prayer in Latin
- ▲ Sing psalms
- ▲ Sing hymns
- ▲ Sing common Mass settings
- ▲ Personal silent meditation on a passage of Scripture or a description of a Biblical scene
- ▲ Personal silent meditation on a description of an event in Church history
- ▲ Personal silent meditation on a saint's writing or on the life of a saint
- ▲ Personal silent meditation on a prayer text
- ▲ Personal silent meditation on a hymn text
- ▲ Personal silent meditation on a suitable poem

Suggestions for other creative elements:

- * Walk through the Mass
- * Walk through the Bible or a specific Gospel
- * Walk through a missalette
- * Walk through a part of the Liturgy of the Hours (e.g., morning, midday, evening, or night prayer)
- * Walk through an examination of conscience
- * Demonstrate how to go to Confession
- * Demonstrate how to receive Holy Communion, and how to offer a thanksgiving prayer after Holy Communion
- * Explain and hold a Jewish Passover Seder
- * Explain different Catholic objects (sacred vessels, sick-call crucifix, special statue, medal or devotional item, relic, etc.)
- * Virtual computer tour of Catholic places
- * Video tour of a major shrine or other Catholic places
- * Video of a major papal event
- * Movie on a Biblical story, the life of a saint, or Catholic theme

Our Lord does not come down from Heaven every day to be in a golden ciborium. He comes to find another Heaven which is infinitely dearer to Him - the Heaven of our souls, created in His image, the living temples of the adorable Trinity.

~ St. Therese of Lisieux

The liturgy is connaturally the center and soul of the whole striving toward perfection in the way in which Mother Church officially proposes it to her children.

*~ Fr. Cyprian Vagaggini, OSB in *Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy**

The Rites of Acceptance and Rite of Welcoming

After this first “gateway” is entered, the catechumens and candidates are in a formal relation with the Church. At each catechetical session they may be given anointings, blessings, and/or minor exorcisms (depending on their baptismal status). All catechesis should be done in the context of celebrations of the Word. (see RCIA 81-105)



The Period of the Catechumenate

(Teaching to the Rites: see RCIA 552, 553 and 556 † Teaching from the Rites: see RCIA 526, 527 and 528)

This is the longest period of the Christian initiation process. It is also the most densely catechetical. The principal guidelines for this period are found in RCIA 75 and 78:

A suitable catechesis is provided by priests or deacons, or by catechists and others of the faithful (RCIA 75):

- ✦ Planned to be gradual and complete in its coverage
- ✦ Accommodated to the liturgical year
- ✦ Solidly supported by celebrations of the Word

This catechesis leads the catechumens [and candidates] not only to an appropriate acquaintance with dogmas and precepts, but also to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they desire to participate.

The instruction that participants receive during this period should (RCIA 78, see also RCIA, National Statutes 7):

- ⊕ Present Catholic teaching in its entirety
- ⊕ Enlighten faith
- ⊕ Direct the heart toward God
- ⊕ Foster participation in the liturgy
- ⊕ Inspire apostolic activity
- ⊕ Nurture a life completely in accord with the spirit of Christ

The Catechetical Components of this period are the elements of the Deposit of Faith:

There is only time to present the “keys” to unlock the basic doctrines of the Deposit of Faith as they are found in Scripture and Tradition. A good guide for these “keys” is the *Credo of the People of God* by Pope Paul VI. As well, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is the “sure norm” for teaching the Deposit of Faith. It should be the constant reference for the catechist. (see CCC 89)

Presuming a complete precatechumenal catechesis, the organization of the truths of the faith can be done along the paradigm for the adult Catholic life:

- ✦ Faith
- ✦ Hope
- ✦ Love



Discernment Interview Prior to the Rite of Acceptance or the Rite of Welcoming

Interviewer: Before beginning, read RCIA 42 and 43. This meeting should be preceded by a discussion with any members of the RCIA community (clergy, team members, godparents, sponsors, etc.) who have assisted in the formation of the individual regarding the person's readiness to take this step.

Use the following questions as a guide for a conversation with the inquirer. As you talk, let the inquirer know how you have seen God at work in his or her life during the inquiry period. Be sure to explain that, while some individuals may be ready to go through this Rite at this point, others may not, and that if someone needs more time to discern, learn about, and decide to follow the Catholic way of life, that is fine. If the individual is interested in celebrating these Rites, and you or others with whom you have spoken have concerns about his or her readiness, explain your concerns and that it might be in the inquirer's best interest to continue to discern for a period of time. At the conclusion of your conversation, unless you or the inquirer needs more time to come to a decision, let him or her know whether or not he or she will participate in the Rite of Acceptance or Welcoming. Notes on the conversation should be taken as needed.

Name: _____

Seeking admission as a catechumen (unbaptized) candidate (baptized)

Godparent(s)/Sponsor(s), if determined: _____

- 1) What has been your experience of the sessions up to this point? What has affected you the most? What have you enjoyed the most? What has challenged you the most?
- 2) What changes have occurred in your relationship with God or with your family or friends during this time?
- 3) What kind of changes do you see in yourself?
- 4) How has your relationship with your godparent/sponsor (if established) been working out?
- 5) What experiences have you had in this parish community up to this point? Are you beginning to have a sense of belonging to this parish community?
- 6) What experiences have you had in reading the Scriptures?
- 7) Tell me about how you pray.
- 8) How would you describe your relationship with Jesus Christ?
- 9) To what degree do you see yourself turning away from sin and developing a desire for virtue?
- 10) Do you feel that you have a good grasp of the gospel (the good news) that Jesus Christ came to reveal? What do you most desire to learn more about?
- 11) How would you describe what being a Catholic/living a Catholic life means? What does it mean to you that a Catholic is called to live a life of charity?
- 12) What does it mean to be a member of the Body of Christ? A member of the Roman Catholic Church?

After explaining the importance of the Rite of Acceptance or the Rite of Welcoming, and the questions that will be asked of the inquirer during the Rite, then ask:

- 13) Do you understand what is being asked of you in the Rite of Acceptance or the Rite of Welcoming?
- 14) Do you feel that you are prepared to take this step in the initiation process?

Signing of the Other Senses

FROM THE RITE OF ACCEPTANCE INTO THE ORDER OF CATECHUMENS

The signing is carried out by the catechists or the sponsors.
(If required by special circumstances, this may be done by assisting priests or deacons.) The signing of each sense may be followed by an acclamation in praise of Christ, for example, "Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!"

While the ears are being signed, the celebrant says:

Receive the sign of the cross on your ears, that you may hear the voice of the Lord.

While the eyes are being signed:

Receive the sign of the cross on your eyes, that you may see the glory of God.

While the lips are being signed:

Receive the sign of the cross on your lips, that you may respond to the word of God.

While the breast is being signed:

Receive the sign of the cross over your heart, that Christ may dwell there by faith.

While the shoulders are being signed:

Receive the sign of the cross on your shoulders, that you may bear the gentle yoke of Christ.

While the hands are being signed:

Receive the sign of the cross on your hands, that Christ may be known in the work which you do.

While the feet are being signed:

Receive the sign of the cross on your feet, that you may walk in the way of Christ.

Without touching them, the celebrant alone makes the sign of the cross over all the candidates at once (or, if they are few, over each individually), saying:

I sign you with the sign of eternal life in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Catechumens:

Amen.



For Those Exploring the Teachings of the Catholic Church: A First Teaching

By Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen

Archbishop Sheen, who died in 1979, is being considered by the Catholic Church for sainthood. During his long life of service, he wrote 95 books on the Catholic faith, and preached hundreds of retreats, especially for priests. In 1951 he began his famous television series entitled, "Life is Worth Living." It eventually reached an estimated 30 million viewers each week, and won an Emmy. He wrote the following to those beginning to explore the Catholic faith...



Dear Inquirer...

1. You are not here because you are going to join the Catholic Church – you are here to investigate it.

There is no more obligation to embrace the Catholic Church because you come to learn about it in inquiry sessions, than there is a duty to buy a mink coat because you enter into a department store. On the other hand, even though you were willing, the Church would not let you join, unless you knew its teachings and the Church was certain of your good dispositions of soul. As St. Peter said: "If anyone asks you to give an account of the hope which you cherish, be ready at all times to answer for it" (1 Peter 3:15).

2. There is only one thing required of you at the beginning, and that is good will.

Good will is readiness to accept the truth. Someone might prove to you that there was sunlight outside of the window, but all the proof in the world would be useless, unless you had the good will to lift up the curtain to allow it to enter the room.

3. Though good will comes from you, God must add something to it, and that is what is called actual grace.

Actual grace is a momentary or transient illumination of the mind to see a truth which was not previously seen, or to do something about that truth which was not previously done. When conversion, therefore, is completed it will be found to be a union of good will with the grace of God.

You may think that you have decided to come to these sessions because you read a certain book, or were inspired by a certain person, or had reached a decision through your own wisdom. These are not the cause, but only the occasion. The real cause is God Himself.

As our Blessed Lord said: "I am the Way; I am Truth and Life; nobody can come to the Father, except through Me" (John 14:6). It is our good will that responds to a God-initiated call.

4. To understand the fullness of the truth, it is necessary not only to study but also to lead a good life.

Not all men are outside of the Church because of ignorance; some are outside of it because of the way they live. Most people do not have difficulty with the creed of the Church; they have difficulty with the commandments.

Good behavior or a moral life are just as essential as study and knowledge. It is the clean of heart that see God. As our Blessed Lord said: "Anyone who acts shamefully hates the light, will not come into the light, for fear that his doings will be found out" (John 3:20).

As a bank robber does not like to have the searchlight of a policeman fixed upon him in his crime, so neither do sinners who are unwilling to abandon their sinful ways like to have the searchlight of God's truth on their iniquity.

5. You will not normally begin your time learning in these sessions with faith, you will begin them with reason.

Just as you cannot go into any store and ask for credit without an investigation having been made of your ability to pay, so neither can you have faith in Christ without a reason for believing Him. These reasons are called motives of credibility. Instead, therefore, of faith being contrary to reason it actually begins with it. That is why instructions in Christian doctrine are not the same as indoctrination into Communism, for example. Communism is forced upon the mind, whereas Christianity is a free correspondence with God's grace.

Furthermore, Communism is contrary to human nature with its hate, whereas Christianity is the perfection of human nature and particularly of human reason. As the telescope does not destroy the eye, so neither does faith destroy reason, but rather opens up to the vision of other worlds.

6. Though there will come a moment in these sessions when you will become absolutely convinced that Christ is the Son of the Living God, True God and True Man, you must not think that this acceptance of His Divinity is due solely to your reason, your judgment, or to a study of the motives of credibility.

This tremendous conviction comes from God Himself through the gift of faith. When Peter affirmed the Divinity of His Master, he was told: "It is not flesh and blood, it is my Father in Heaven that has revealed this to you" (Matthew 16:17).

7. The gravity and the number of your sins are not an obstacle to coming to the Church.

It is rather the recognition of our sinfulness that makes our soul clamor for a Redeemer. Just as we sometimes can run up more debts than we can pay, so we know that of and by our own resources we cannot make up for sins. Hence Christ, Who is the Son of God, became Man.

As Man He could take our sins upon Himself, as God His reparation and atonement for them on the Cross would have infinite merit. The worst thing in the world is not sin, it is far worse to deny sin. He who is blind and denies vision has no hope for a cure. If you had never sinned you never could call Christ your Savior.

8. The teaching will lead to an understanding of another life than that of the physical or the natural.

Two little tadpoles in the water were one day discussing the possibility of another kind of existence than their own. One said that he was going to look for another world. His companion said: "Don't be so foolish as to think there is anything else in the world besides water."

As it would be foolish for the rose to deny that there was a higher life than that of the plants, so it is foolish for us to deny that there is a higher life than that of the human. This life which is above the natural is called supernatural, which means above the natural, and is the life of God in which we participate once we are united to Jesus Christ.

You are natural because you were born of your parents; you are supernatural because you were born of God. That is why sacred Scripture always urges us to become something that we are not. By nature we are only creatures; by supernatural grace, we are children of God.

It is possible to put a pebble in a gold setting but the gold setting was made for a diamond; so it is possible for us to go on living human natural lives though we were made to become settings for the Divine life of grace.

9. All during your instructions you must pray.

Though you may know few formal prayers, say many times during the day this simple invocation: "O Lord, give me a knowledge of the truth and a strength to follow it." Let your first petition be to know the fullness of truth, not mere fragments of it that come from human knowledge. When finally this fullness of truth does come to your mind, you will see that all the bits of information that you had before were like the crazy patterns of a Japanese lantern. But after Divine Truth comes into your mind it is like a candle put into that lantern, in which everything is revealed as a beautiful design.

But, it is not enough to merely know the truth. Truth implies tremendous responsibility. There are many who like to knock at the door of truth, but they would hate to see it open. That is why you must add the second prayer, the strength to follow the truth as you see it.

St. Paul condemned the pagan Romans: "Although they had the knowledge of God, they did not honor Him or give thanks to Him as God... and their senseless hearts grew darkened" (Romans 1:21). During the time of these inquiry sessions remember that there are thousands of blessings suspended from Heaven on silken cords, and prayer is the sword that cuts them.

10. Be prepared for the enmity and hatred of the world.

If you joined a sun cult, or one of the Oriental religions, or became a Muslim, or started a religion of your own, your friends would say to you, "Well he's free and that is the way he believes." But just as soon as you embrace the Catholic Church you will be accused of having lost your reason, of having surrendered your freedom, and of cutting off the pleasures of life. It is the Church that makes the difference.

So long as you join any natural religion you are part of the world, therefore, the world accepts you. But when you embrace the Church, you are lifted out of the natural into the supernatural order; your mind undergoes a complete reversal of values, the world sees that it has lost its own and therefore, it will despise you.

Our Blessed Lord warned that this would happen. "If the world hates you be sure that it hated Me before it learned to hate you. If you belonged to the world, the world would know you for its own and love you; it is because you do not belong to the world, because I have chosen you from the midst of the world that the world hates you. Do not forget what I said to you. No servant can be greater than His Master. If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you" (John 15:18).

11. Be not disturbed by any prejudices against the Catholic Church which you bring to your first sessions.

Perhaps if I had been told the same lies against the Church that so many in our society have been told, I might have hated the Church ten times more than some. People, I find, do not hate the Church, they only hate that which they mistakenly believe to be the Church.

When you look at stained glass windows from the outside of a church, they seem to have no pattern, they are only a mass of crazy leaden lines; but once you are in the church, these windows glow with Scriptural figures. So the Church will shine before your soul as Christ continuing and living through the ages, once you are in it.

12. Your greatest joys are before you.

Even if there are sorrows and trials in your life they will be made sweet through the cross. All other religions are sunshine religions. The Catholic faith begins not with sunshine but with the shadow, not with the feast but with the fast, not with the Resurrection but the Cross. We begin with defeat and end in glory.

In the faith, you will come to the fullness and perfection of love. As the highest peak of love in the natural order is the union of two in one flesh in matrimony, so in the reception of Communion you have the union of two in one Christ which is the perfection of love. In the future, you will refrain from sin not because it is the breaking of a law, but because it is the wounding of Someone you love.

From the day of your conversion onward, you will read your own autobiography on the crucifix. Every sin of pride will be seen as the crown of thorns, every grasping avarice will be seen in His nailed hands, every wandering from God's grace will be told in His riven feet, every errant love will be read in His wounded Heart, but there will never be despair but love, for you will say with St. John of the Cross:

**Oh sweet burn! Oh, delectable wound!
Oh, soft hand, Oh, delicate touch
That savors eternal life and pays every debt,
In slaying thou has changed my death to life.**