

Q What is the first stage in the process of initiation, and what happens during that time?

A The Period of Evangelization and Precatechumenate is an open-ended period of time that encourages inquirers to “come and see.” The Gospel is proclaimed, life stories are shared, and questions are asked and discussed. It is an opportunity for participants to come to first faith and an initial conversion to Jesus Christ.

Essentially informal in its approach, this period is a time for inquirers to share their stories, to ponder them in the light of the great stories of Scripture, and to awaken to the ways that God has been and continues to be a part of their lives—to recognize that God has been inviting them into a relationship. In these discussions, the catechist helps the inquirers know that God first chose each one of them and knew each one before they were born.

The catechist focuses on the questions, issues, and concerns of the inquirers, making connections to Scripture and Tradition, to the ways God has been part of human history from creation until the present. Inquirers come to know the key people and events of salvation history (Old Testament and New Testament), as well as the saints and Mary, and of course, the life of Jesus, the Christ. As conversations bring these matters more and more into the consciousness of inquirers, the Holy Spirit opens their minds and hearts to God’s activity.

In this period inquirers become acquainted with Catholic signs, symbols, and gestures. They take a tour of the church and learn the names of places and sacred items. They observe, in a general way, how Catholics celebrate the liturgical year and its seasons, including the colors of the



seasons. They learn how Catholics care for one another and reach out beyond the parish to care for all the children of God in need: the widow, the orphan, and people who live on the margins of society.

It is also important at this time for the inquirers to become personally acquainted with some of the people in the faith community with whom they will be journeying. Assembly members willing to be conversation partners can help inquirers see how Catholic Christians live the Gospel in daily life, how they pray and how they serve, how they make choices in life based on the Gospel and the teachings of the Church—how they think about and practice their faith. Engaging in such conversations with members of the assembly and praying with the community each week, inquirers learn how a community of disciples lives and how it celebrates events in the lives of parishioners in good times and in bad times.

Assembly members also serve this evangelization phase of Christian initiation by praying for all who seek God and a community of faith. They might also pray for the grace to recognize seekers and share their faith in helpful ways.

The key goal of this period is to help each inquirer begin to develop a personal relationship with Jesus that will deepen throughout their life. The time this takes will be different for each individual. Inquirers will be ready for the next step when they have grown into a relationship with Jesus Christ that empowers them to want to declare publically that they are ready to accept the Gospel and learn to follow him.