

Q What is the Period of the Catechumenate? What happens during this period of initiation?

A The Period of the Catechumenate is the second stage in the initiation process. When inquirers, along with the pastor, catechists, and others who have been involved with them, discern that they are ready to publically express their desire to accept the Gospel and follow the way of Jesus Christ, the inquirer is invited to celebrate the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens. This rite formally begins the second stage.

The Catechumenate should be a long period of formation, catechesis, and ongoing discernment nourished by communal and personal prayer. Catechumens are guided in the ways of Christian living (formation) and taught about the faith (catechesis); they continue to listen for the Holy Spirit's call (prayer and discernment). They pray regularly with the community and with the help of sponsors and others begin to develop a personal prayer life.

The rite envisions a catechumen spending a minimum of one full liturgical year in this period to provide time for the Gospel to take root and rouse conversion of heart and mind. Together the catechists, sponsors, and the catechumen listen for the promptings of the Holy Spirit to discern future steps in the process.

The seasons and celebrations of the liturgical year with their readings, prayers, and music all reveal the mysteries and teachings of the faith—especially the Paschal Mystery at its core (the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ). Experiencing the unfolding of those insights and teachings throughout a full liturgical year is an important part of the catechesis of the Catechumenate. In this way, catechumens receive instruction; they become acquainted with the basic dogmas and precepts of the Church, reflect on them, and begin to make them their own.

Catechumens experience the new life to which they are called in the midst of the Christian assembly. The community helps catechumens to know Jesus, to live as Christians, and to hear the call of the Holy Spirit.

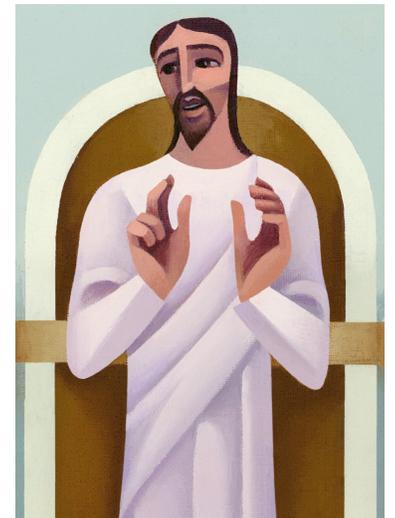
Catechumens should learn to be active readers of Scripture, regular in prayer, and should attempt to reform their lives around the Church's proclamation of the Gospel. Sessions during this period will include prayer, reflection, and discussion on particular Church teachings, as well as testimony from members of the community.

During this period, Catechumens are dismissed from the Sunday assembly to reflect together on the Word. Since

they are not yet initiated they cannot intercede for the world in the Universal Prayer, pray the Profession of Faith, or participate in the Eucharist. They are nourished by several other rites, including celebrations of the Word, minor exorcisms, blessings, and anointing with the oil of catechumens.

Catechumens should have sponsors, catechists, and others from the assembly with whom they can dialogue regularly. These Christians are companions and guides, sharing their faith, engaging with them in prayer and in discernment about what God desires for them. Catechumens should also know that the whole parish is supporting them in prayer.

At the end of the period, catechumens will not know everything about the Christian faith, nor will they be perfect Christians. But they will have a good grasp of the faith and its rituals and have a desire to be more fully part of the Church's celebration. When the pastor, catechists, and sponsors, with the catechumens, discern that the catechumens are ready, the parish may celebrate the Rite of Sending and send them to the bishop for the Rite of Election at the beginning of Lent. That rite formally ends the Period of the Catechumenate and names the catechumens "the elect"—those chosen for the sacraments of initiation.



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