



What is OCIA?

The Order of Christian Initiation of Adults is not merely a new way to prepare adults for baptism in the Catholic Church – baptism is only the first step.

The goal of the process is full communion with the Church which means “full, conscious, and active participation” ([Sacrosanctum Concilium](#) #14) in the Eucharist and the whole life of the Catholic faith community.

OCIA helps adults to grow in their relationship with God, become familiar with Catholic teachings and practices, get acquainted with people in their parish, and get involved in service within the parish and the wider community.

Many people who want to join the Catholic Church have already been baptized in another Christian church. They will not be rebaptized, but instead will follow a form of the [four steps of](#) OCIA adapted to the particular needs and concerns of Christians from other faith traditions.

OCIA isn't just for people who want to become Catholic. It's also available to Catholics who may not have had all of their sacraments of initiation (baptism, first Holy Communion or confirmation) earlier in life. OCIA can also be a great way for already active Catholics to rediscover and more deeply understand the foundations of our faith.

The OCIA process

Step 1: Period of Inquiry

How someone comes to the Catholic Church is unique to each person, but it all starts with a personal encounter at the parish nearest you. Deacon Dan Hoffert and his wife Linda are St. Margart Mary's OCIA coordinators. After your initial conversation with them, you may consider joining others who are on a similar path, meeting with OCIA

team members, and starting a period of questioning and discovery. This first step can go on for months or years – it is up to you and the Holy Spirit!

Step 2: Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens and the Period of the Catechumenate

If after your initial inquiry you would like to move on to a more formal study of the Catholic faith, your pastor or OCIA coordinator will invite you to what's called the Rite of Acceptance.

This is the first time the inquirers publicly declare their faith before the parish community, accompanied by a sponsor who provides support and a listening ear throughout the OCIA process. From this point forward, you are called a “catechumen,” indicating that you are actively learning the teachings of the Church. The time spent as a catechumen varies from person to person. The bishops of the United States have suggested that this period should last for at least a year or longer – it depends on how you are growing in faith, what questions you encounter along the way, and how God is leading you on this journey.

Step 3: Rite of Election and the Period of Purification and Enlightenment

The period of study known as the catechumenate ends when you discern, with the help of your sponsor and the parish OCIA team, that God is calling you to receive the sacraments of initiation ([Baptism](#) if needed, [Confirmation](#) and [Holy Eucharist](#)).

The end of this stage of the OCIA process is marked by the “Rite of Election” – when the names of all the catechumens seeking baptism at the coming Easter Vigil are formally recognized. In the Diocese of Charlotte, three Rites of Election are held early in the Lenten season at convenient locations across the diocese for catechumens, their sponsors and families. During the Rite of Election, you and the other catechumens as a group publicly express the desire for baptism to the bishop, and each parish presents to the bishop a book containing their names. You are now called the “elect.”

Step 4: Initiation and Mystagogia

At the Easter Vigil (the Saturday night before Easter Sunday), the elect celebrate their [Baptism](#), [Confirmation](#) and [first Holy Eucharist](#). For the newly initiated, now called “neophytes,” the time between Easter and Pentecost Sunday is a special opportunity to reflect on the commitment they have made to the Lord, the Church, and to the local parish community. This time of unfolding the meaning of the initiation sacraments is called “mystagogia.” The newly baptized members reflect on their experiences at the Easter Vigil and continue to learn more about the Scriptures, the Sacraments, and the teachings of the Catholic Church.

This is not an end to your journey but a beginning – the journey of faith lasts a lifetime. The weeks after Easter are a time for you and your fellow new Catholics to settle into your new parish family.

