



Becoming a Catholic Christian

I'm interested. What should my first step be?

[Contact Fr. Fleming](#). Fr. Fleming can discuss with you the specifics of the initiation process at St. James. Know the prayers of a half-million Catholics in the Archdiocese of St. Louis are with you as you complete your journey. Best wishes!

The formation of adults and process by which they are initiated into the Church is known as the "Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults," or the "RCIA."

RCIA is for:

•**Unbaptized...** persons who have attained the age of reason (7 years and older) follow a process to help them grow in awareness to God's call to conversion as well as ways to respond to that call. They are considered *catechumens*.

•**Baptized in Another Christian Church...** those catechized and uncatechized persons from a faith tradition other than Catholic who are seeking full communion with the Roman Catholic Church (Eucharist and Confirmation). They are considered candidates.

•**Baptized but uncatechized Catholic Adults...** persons who were baptized as infants in the Catholic Church but did not receive any religious upbringing within the Catholic Tradition. These adults will be prepared to celebrate the sacraments of Penance, Confirmation and Eucharist. They are also considered *candidates*.

In the case of children who have reached the age of reason (ages 7-16), the pastor of All Saints parish should be consulted for information about Baptism and the other Sacraments of Initiation.

Adult Catholics who were baptized and received their First Eucharist in the Catholic Church and are interested in the Sacrament of Confirmation should contact our [parish office](#).

What is the Rite of Christian Initiation?

The Rite of Christian Initiation is based on the principle that the process of conversion proceeds gradually, in stages. Progress from one stage to the next is marked by a liturgical celebration in the midst of the parish community. The experience and needs of each individual differs, and so the length of time may vary for each person, yet there are certain similarities in the process everyone will experience.

Precatechumenate

The first stage is called the period of inquiry (or the precatechumenate). This is when the individual first expresses an interest in becoming a Christian or a Catholic. With the help of the parish community, the individual explores his or her relationship with Christ and how that relationship might be enriched and deepened by joining this Christian community. There is no liturgical rite to mark the beginning of this stage. This period of inquiry may last several months or several years and ends either when the inquirer feels ready to move forward and the community is prepared to welcome him or her or decides against continuing in this direction.

Catechumenate

The second stage is called the catechumenate and, for the unbaptized listed above, who are now called "catechumens," lasts for one year or more. For the baptized but uncatechized (not yet educated in the

faith), the period should be a similar length. "Candidates" for full communion may complete this stage in a shorter time frame. The Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens (for catechumens) and the Rite of Welcoming (for candidates) mark the beginning of this stage. Catechesis is based in Scripture and proclaimed in the midst of the worshiping community. This is also a time for the catechumen or candidate to learn how to live as a Catholic Christian through their faith journey and the support of their parish community. This period ends when the catechumens and candidates express their desire to receive the sacraments of initiation and the parish community acknowledges their readiness. The catechumen then becomes an "elect," which is marked by the Rite of Election during the next stage.

Purification and Enlightenment

The third stage is the period of purification and enlightenment. It coincides with the liturgical season of Lent. During this time, the elect (catechumens) and the candidates enter into a period of intense preparation and prayer which includes the three public celebrations of the scrutinies (for catechumens) and is marked by the presentations of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. The Rite of Election (for catechumens) and the Call to Continuing Conversion (for candidates) are celebrated at the beginning of this stage. This period ends with the celebration of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil. (Note: only the elect are baptized. All receive the sacrament of Confirmation and welcomed at the Eucharistic table.

Mystagogy

The fourth stage is the period of post baptismal catechesis or mystagogy. The newly initiated explore their experience of being fully initiated through participation with all the faithful at Sunday Eucharist and through appropriate catechesis. The period formally lasts through the Easter season and may be marked by a parish celebration on or near Pentecost. On a more informal level, mystagogy is a lifelong process, one in which all Christians are engaged, as we all work to deepen our sense of what it means to live the Christian life.

It is important to note that "Candidates" do not always need to take part in the full process. If they have been actively living the Christian life in another denomination, they are likely to need very little catechesis and may be welcomed into the Church on any Sunday after a short period of preparation. According to the National Statutes for the Catechumenate, "Those baptized persons who have lived as Christians and need only instruction in the Catholic tradition and a degree of probation within the Catholic community should not be asked to undergo a full program parallel to the catechumenate."

Pope John Paul II often said: "Open wide your heart to Jesus Christ."

If something is missing in your life, if there is an emptiness you cannot explain, know that Jesus Christ can fill the void. Think about finding him in the Catholic Church, the Church Jesus Himself founded 2,000 years ago.

Open your heart. Listen for His call, and go to him. However far away you may feel, you are never too distant from the God who made you. The call is there, inside you. The way is there, in Christ's Church and in His cross, which shine like beacons of hope into the emptiness and confusion of this upside-down age.

The time to return to the Father's house, now more than ever, is today. This hour. This moment.