Becoming Catholic

The Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA)

Adults become Catholic through their local parish. Most prepare from autumn to Easter in a group called OCIA (it used to be called RCIA). The Church sets no fixed length: if you need more time, you take more time.

1 Inquiry

You come to meetings, ask questions and get to know the faith, without promising anything. Bring every question, including the hard ones, and start coming to Sunday Mass.

2 The Catechumenate

It begins at a Sunday Mass with the Rite of Acceptance: you say in front of the parish that you want to become a Christian, and the priest traces the cross on your forehead. Then comes the longest stage, learning what the Church believes, how Catholics pray and how they live, with a sponsor at your side.

3 Purification and Enlightenment

The weeks of Lent. On the first Sunday the bishop chooses you for baptism at the Rite of Election, usually at the cathedral. On the third, fourth and fifth Sundays the parish prays over you in the Scrutinies, and you receive the Creed and the Lord's Prayer.

4 The Sacraments of Initiation

At the Easter Vigil you are baptized, confirmed and receive your first Communion, all in one night. The fifty days to Pentecost that follow (Mystagogy) help you settle into parish life.

Already baptized in another church?

If you were baptized with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, you are already a Christian and are not baptized again. You talk with the priest, prepare in a way that fits what you already know, make your first confession, and are received into full communion, often at an ordinary Sunday Mass, with Confirmation and first Communion.

Do I have to believe everything already?

No. The preparation exists for your questions and doubts. By the day you are received you should be able to say honestly that you believe what the Church teaches.

Can I come to Mass before then?

Yes, and you should. Until you are received you do not go up for Communion; in many parishes you can go up with your arms crossed for a blessing.

Does it cost anything?

The sacraments are free. Some parishes ask a small amount for books, and nobody is turned away for lack of money.

Married outside the Church?

Tell the priest at your first meeting. Your marriage may need attention before you are received, and he will explain the steps.

Start here

Groups usually begin in September or October. Contact the parish office in spring or summer so the priest can meet you first.

Contact _____

Phone or email _____

Next group begins _____