

The Rite for Entrance into the Catechumenate



DISCUSSION GUIDE

part 2 of 7



The Rite for Entrance into the Catechumenate

It is in our human nature to mark a significant moment of transformation and change of identity with a rite of passage. The Rite of Entrance into the Catechumenate recognizes an individual's initial conversion and desire to enter into a relationship with God in Christ. In this rite, representatives of the Church go out to meet the inquirers. They ascertain their intentions, claim them for Christ with the sign of the cross, and then welcome them into the assembly. With these movements and gestures, the Church embraces them as her own and begins to nourish them with the Word and support them with blessing and instruction. From this point onward, inquirers are called "catechumens."



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FOR YOUR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

WHAT DO YOU SEEK?

Following the communal singing of a hymn and warm and heartfelt greeting, the presider expresses the joy and happiness of the Church on this day. Before they begin their long journey through the Period of the Catechumenate, the liturgy invites the inquirers to share what is in their heart and on their mind. Because they now have a sense of our community, have been introduced to Gospel values, and have a desire to enter a relationship with Christ, we expect an honest and well-thought-out response. In turn, the presider asks us, the baptized faithful, if we are willing to commit our time and attention to those who seek eternal life through the Easter sacraments. (See RCIA/OCIA, 42, 50, 53)

- How are we preparing inquirers to state publicly their hopes and intentions for entering the Order of Catechumens?
- Why might it be important for inquirers to answer the opening dialogue questions (RCIA/OCIA, 50) in their own words?

SIGNED WITH THE CROSS

Christian initiation isn't about being baptized; it's about being integrated into the Body of Christ. In this first step on that path, representatives of the Church physically claim the inquirers for Christ with the sign of the cross. By marking their forehead and perhaps also each of their senses with the cross of salvation, the Church invites the inquirers to reflect more deeply on the meaning of the path they are choosing and embraces them as her own. She now calls them catechumens and considers them members of the household of Christ.

- How can your community members get to know the catechumens and express to them that they are members of the household of Christ?
- Ask those who have taken part in this rite what they experienced when they were signed with the cross. What did it mean to them? How do you feel when you make the sign of the cross yourself? What does it mean to you?

THE ART OF ACCOMPANIMENT

Many persons come to faith through the witness and accompaniment of a friend or family member. Long before someone ever sets foot in church, they have often been ministered to by members of the faithful through personal conversations and the "wordless witness" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 21) that inspires curiosity about the Christian way of life. The men and women who share their faith in this way and encourage others on the path to Christ are a natural choice to serve as sponsors for inquirers. It is these men and women who should present them to the Church in the Rite of Entrance.

- How can we foster a greater sense in our parish that a sponsor in the catechumenal process is someone who simply and naturally walks with and shares their own experience of faith with an inquirer or candidate?
- How is the role of a sponsor a natural expression of our understanding that every baptized person is called to evangelize?