



Diocese of
OWENSBORO

Pandemic Edition

THE RITE OF ACCEPTANCE INTO THE ORDER OF CATECHUMENS
AND
THE RITE OF WELCOMING BAPTIZED BUT PREVIOUSLY UNCATECHIZED ADULTS
WHO ARE PREPARING FOR CONFIRMATION AND/OR EUCHARIST
OR
RECEPTION INTO THE FULL COMMUNION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH
(*COMBINED RITE*)

This rite is for use in communities where inquirers into the Catholic faith (those who have not been baptized) are being accepted into the Catechumenate in order to prepare for initiation, and where baptized but previously uncatechized adults are beginning catechetical formation, either prior to completing their Christian initiation in the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist, or prior to being received into the full communion of the Catholic Church. This rite is required for inquirers (candidates for the Catechumenate). It is optional for baptized candidates, but remains a meaningful way to introduce them to the parish community and reminds the faithful to keep them in prayer as they begin their journey.

As usual, all of the guidelines for public Mass during the pandemic must be followed. Latest guidelines for Mass may be found [here](#) on the Diocese of Owensboro website. It is important to prepare for the rite ahead of time so that all safety precautions may be considered. Some points of consideration due to the pandemic:

- While preparing the inquirers/candidates and sponsors for the ritual, remind them of all the safety precautions (wearing masks, physical distancing, etc.).
- Where will the inquirers/candidates and their sponsors stand during each part of the rite so they can maintain 6 foot distance?
 - If the signing with the cross is to take place within the church, consider marking where each catechumen/candidate and sponsor will stand so physical distance can be maintained and the ritual can proceed smoothly and without confusion.
- Will a microphone be used? If so, consider using a microphone stand and try to place it in a location where the person speaking can walk up to it one at a time at a distance, instructing them beforehand not to handle the microphone.
 - The person speaking may briefly remove their mask to speak, and then resume it immediately.

STRUCTURE OF THE COMBINED RITE

Receiving the Inquirers and Candidates (*at the Threshold of the Church*)

The inquirers/candidates and their sponsors gather outside the church (or the entrance) while maintaining 6 foot distance. The priest goes to meet them. The cantor may sing an opening song.

Greeting

The priest greets the inquirers and candidates, expressing the joy of the Church. There is room here for him to tell what brought these inquirers to this point.

Opening Dialogue

The inquirers and candidates are introduced to the assembly.

Inquirers' First Acceptance of the Gospel

Note that this is not the passing on of a book, but the embrace of a way of life patterned on the Good News. This is the principal expression by the inquirer that she or he does indeed wish to embrace a life of discipleship.

Candidates' Declaration of Intent

Each candidate states that they desire to enter more fully into the life of the Church.

Affirmation by the Sponsors and the Assembly

The sponsors and the assembly affirm that they are ready to help the inquirers and candidates find and follow Christ. The priest concludes with a prayer.

Signing of the Inquirers with the Cross

As a sign of their new way of life, the inquirers are signed with the cross in front of the forehead, this should be done without physical touch. It is optional to sign the other senses and their hands and feet, so this may be omitted. If this is still done, it should also be without physical touch. From this point forward, they are called "catechumens."

Signing of the Candidates with the Cross

The combined rite explicitly separates the signing of the candidates from the signing of the catechumens.

The priest concludes with a prayer.

Invitation to the Celebration of the Word of God

All enter the church for the Liturgy of the Word. Seats/pews should be reserved for them so they can maintain 6 feet distance.

The Liturgy of the Word

Instruction

The priest gives a brief instruction on the dignity of God's Word.

Readings and Homily

The Liturgy of the Word proceeds as usual. The scriptures proclaimed and preached are those of the day.

Presentation of a Bible (optional)

This is optional. If done, it would be best to have an individual Bible to give to each catechumen/candidate to keep rather than each one touching the Book of the Gospels. Hand sanitizer should be used before presenting the Bibles.

Intercessions for the Catechumens and Candidates

Prayer over the Catechumens and Candidates

Dismissal of the Catechumens

The catechumens are dismissed from the assembly with a catechist, signifying that their formation in the Word has begun. The candidates' distinction as baptized Christians is to be honored and they are not to be dismissed from the celebration of the Eucharist.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

The Liturgy of the Eucharist proceeds as usual.

COMBINED RITES OF ACCEPTANCE AND WELCOME

Receiving the Inquirers and Candidates

The inquirers and their sponsors, gather “outside the church.”¹ Six foot physical distance is to be maintained at all times and masks are to be worn.

Instead of the customary procession of ministers to the front during the gathering song (sang only by the cantor), consider having the priest and other ministers simply take their places before it is time to begin.

Leave the main doors to the church open. Be sure a microphone is available, so that the responses of the inquirers and candidates can be heard clearly. If using a microphone, consider using a stand and try to place it in a location where the person speaking can walk up to it one at a time at a distance, instructing them beforehand not to handle the microphone. The mask may be briefly removed while speaking, then resumed.

When it is time to begin, an appropriate gathering song begins (sung by the cantor alone). All stand, and the priest, along with any other ministers, process to the entrance. If the church is constructed so that there is a good degree of visibility from the centrum to outside (e.g., if there is a glass wall), they may even go outside to where the inquirers are gathered.

As the song ends, the priest faces and greets the assembly:

Presider: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

A: Amen.

Presider: The Lord be with you.

A: And with your spirit.

GREETING

Presider: My brothers and sisters, this truly a day of joy! As we do each Sunday, today we gather in the presence of the Holy Spirit, as we give thanks and praise to God for the gift of Jesus Christ, the anointed one, to whom we offer our love, our honor, our thanks, our entire lives.

¹ The rite gives a great deal of leeway, continuing “(or inside at the entrance or elsewhere) or at some other site suitable.” (RCIA, 48). The intent of the rite is one of the assembly going out to greet these newcomers, but during the Pandemic, it would be safest to have the assembly be seated in their seat/pews before the rite begins. This should be taken into consideration when deciding where the inquirers/candidates and their sponsors will be met so that the assembly is able to participate. This will need to be adapted in each parish.

Today, we will welcome new inquirers into the catechumenate. Over the coming year, they will prepare for their initiation into the Christian faith by baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist.

We also greet those who, already one with us by baptism, now wish to complete their Christian initiation through Confirmation and Eucharist (or to be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church).²

You are very important in this rite, for it is the entire Church – those in this community as well as the entire Body of Christ that is beyond the walls of this place – that accepts these inquirers and candidates as persons who intend to become followers of Jesus Christ as members of the Roman Catholic Church.

OPENING DIALOGUE

He turns to the inquirers.

Presider: Who seeks entrance into this faith community?

A member of the RCIA Team answers:

RCIA Team Member: There are inquirers here, who during the past months have heard the living God proclaimed, and they have encountered Jesus Christ, sent for the salvation of all. As a result of this initial conversion, they have begun to change their lives, and be transformed in the life of Christ. Today they come seeking entrance into this faith community, where they wish to continue to grow as disciple of the Lord. We give thanks to God for them, as they seek begin the Catechumenate period of their faith journey. They are:

The inquirers are named.

As each is named, he or she steps forward. The sponsor brings the inquirer to the priest (maintaining 6 foot distance), who asks the inquirer:

Presider: N., what do you ask of God's Church?

² You'll need to word this according to the circumstances of the candidate(s) present.

I: Faith.³

Presider: What does faith offer you?

I: Eternal life.

That inquirer steps aside, and the next inquirer is named and brought forward.

This process is repeated for each inquirer.⁴ When all the inquirers have been presented, the RCIA Team Member continues:

RCIA Team Member: There are also baptized candidates here, who seek to complete their Christian initiation. They are:

The candidates are named, using this format:

N., baptized on (date), at (church, city).

As he or she is named, the candidate comes forward with the sponsor. The sponsor brings the candidate to the priest, who asks:

Presider: N., What do you ask of God's Church?

Can: To be accepted as a candidate for catechetical instruction leading to Confirmation and Eucharist (or: reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church).

Presider: What does this period of formation offer you?

Can: A fuller sharing in the life of the Church.

CATECHUMENS' FIRST ACCEPTANCE OF THE GOSPEL

When all have been named and questioned, the priest continues, addressing the inquirers:

Presider: Inquirers, God gives light to everyone who comes into this world; though unseen, he reveals himself through the works of his hand, so that all people may learn to give thanks to their Creator.

You have followed God's light, and the way of the Gospel now lies open before you. Set your feet firmly on the path, and acknowledge the living God, who truly speaks to everyone. Walk in the light of

³ The rite clearly allows inquirers to answer in their own words. Especially if there are only a few inquirers, a heartfelt, well-thought out one or two sentences would have a stronger impact.

⁴ The rite does allow, if there is a large number of inquirers, that the questions may be asked only once of all the inquirers.

Christ, and learn to trust in his wisdom. Commit your lives daily to his care, so that you may come to believe in him with all your heart.

This is the way of faith along which Christ will lead you in love toward eternal life. Are you prepared to begin this journey today, under the guidance of Christ?⁵

I: I am.

CANDIDATES' DECLARATION OF INTENT

He then addresses the candidates:

Presider: Those of you who seek to complete your Christian initiation [or: be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church**], are you prepared to listen to the apostles' instruction, gather with us for prayer, and join us in the love and service of others?**

Can: I am.

AFFIRMATION BY THE SPONSORS AND THE ASSEMBLY

Presider: Sponsors, you present these inquirers to us; Are you ready to help these inquirers by being witnesses to the living Christ, and accompanying them on the journey of discipleship?

S: We are.

Presider: Members of this assembly, these sponsors have spoken in your name, but I ask you as well, for it is your responsibility to journey with them. Are you ready to journey with these inquirers, helping them to know and follow Christ?

S: We are.

⁵ Other options for the acceptance of the Gospel may be found in RCIA, 52.

With hands joined, the priest prays:

**Presider: Father of mercy,
we thank you for these your servants.
You have sought and summoned them in many ways,
and they have turned to seek you.
You have called them today, and they have answered in our
presence:
we praise you, Lord, and we bless you.**

All: We praise you, Lord, and we bless you.

If the arrangement is such that visibility is poor, consider reprising the gathering song (cantor only) at this point, and leading the inquirers and candidates into the midst of the assembly (maintaining physical distancing), taking care to keep inquirers and candidates clearly distinguished.⁶ It may be helpful to mark on the floor (painters' tape, etc.) where each person will stand ahead of time to be sure there is plenty of room for distancing. When they are in the church, the priest continues:

SIGNING OF THE CATECHUMENS WITH THE CROSS

Presider: Dear inquirers, your answers mean that you wish to share our life and hope in Christ. To admit you as catechumens, we now mark you with the sign of Christ's cross. The whole community welcomes you with love, and stands ready to help you.

With their sponsors, the inquirers come one by one to the celebrant; he traces a cross in front of the forehead without physical touch.

Presider: Receive the sign of the cross on your forehead. It is Christ himself who now strengthens you with this sign of his love. Learn to know and follow him.

All: Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

⁶ Consider options within your church that would allow for physical distancing, such as positioning the inquirers in the center aisle with the assembly facing toward them. This may mean blocking off seats on the sides of the pew near the aisle. You will get a much stronger sense of the Church gathering around the inquirers this way. Remember that the candidates are already numbered among the baptized. If you have multiple aisles, perhaps you could place them in other aisles among the assembly, facing the inquirers.

The sponsors stand in front of the inquirers. As the priest says each prayer, the sponsor traces the cross over the inquirer as indicated (without physical touch). Signing the senses and hands and feet are optional and may be omitted.

**Presider: Receive the sign of the cross on your ears,
that you may hear the voice of the Lord.**

All: Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

**Presider: Receive the sign of the cross on your eyes,
that you may see the glory of God.**

All: Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

**Presider: Receive the sign of the cross on your lips,
that you may respond to the word of God.**

All: Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

**Presider: Receive the sign of the cross over your heart,
that Christ may dwell there by faith.**

All: Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

**Presider: Receive the sign of the cross on your shoulders,
that you may bear the gentle yoke of Christ.**

All: Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

**Presider: Receive the sign of the cross on your hands,
that Christ may be known in the work which you do.**

All: Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

**Presider: Receive the sign of the cross on your feet,
that you may walk in the way of Christ.**

All: Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

Without touching them, the priest makes the sign of the cross over all the catechumens at once⁷, as he says:

Presider: I sign you with the sign of eternal life, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, + and of the Holy Spirit.

Catechumen: Amen.

SIGNING OF THE CANDIDATES WITH THE CROSS

He turns to the baptized candidates:

Presider: Dear candidates, you have expressed your desire to share fully in the life of the Catholic Church. I now mark you with the sign of Christ's cross, and call upon your catechists and sponsors to do the same.

With their sponsors, the candidates come one by one to the celebrant; he traces a cross in front of the forehead without physical touch. As the priest says the prayer, the sponsor traces the cross in front of the candidate's forehead without physical touch.⁸

Presider: Receive the sign of the cross on your forehead, as a reminder of your baptism into Christ's saving death and resurrection.

All: Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

PRAYER

Presider: Lord, by the cross and resurrection of your Son, you have given life to your people. Your servants have been signed with the sign of Christ's cross: make them living proof of its saving power, and help them to persevere in the footsteps of Christ.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.⁹

⁷ If it is the custom in your parish to present your catechumens with a cross, it would be appropriate for the sponsor to do this as the priest prays this final blessing (RCIA, 59).

⁸ Although it is an option to sign all of the senses of the candidates as well, in the combined rite it is probably best to sign only the forehead. If all the senses are signed, however, the rite explicitly states that the signing is *repeated* after the inquirers (not performed concurrently). The signing should be done without physical contact.

⁹ Another option for this prayer is found in RCIA, 57.

All: Amen.

INVITATION TO CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

Presider: My dear catechumens and candidates, [come now with us into the Church, to] share with us now at the table of God’s word.¹⁰

The Liturgy of the Word

The gathering song may be repeated here by the cantor alone, or another appropriate song, as the catechumens and candidates come into the church (if not there already) for the liturgy of the word, led by the cross bearer. They should have reserved seats/pews so that physical distance may be maintained. Then the priest addresses the catechumens and candidates again in these or similar words¹¹:

Presider: Catechumens and candidates, during your preparation, you will gather each week with the Church, and share with us the Liturgy of the Word. Listen to these scriptures carefully, for when the scriptures are proclaimed in Church, it is Christ himself who speaks. St. Ambrose, bishop of Milan in the 4th century, encouraged us to “drink in” the scriptures we hear like a delicious beverage. He said,

“Drink deeply of both beverages, the first testament and the second, because in each of them you are drinking Christ.

Drink Christ because he is the vine.

Drink Christ because he is the rock that gushes forth water.

Drink Christ because he is the fountain of life.

Drink Christ because he is the river, whose streams give joy to God’s city.

Drink Christ because he is peace.

Drink Christ because from his belly rivers of living water will flow.

¹⁰ If you’ve already brought them into the Church, you might say, “join us now and...”

¹¹ What is provided here is an example of what might be said as an instruction to the catechumens (and candidates), who are officially joining us at this point as “hearers of the word.” RCIA #61 simply says that the priest “speaks to them briefly, helping them to understand the dignity of God’s word, which is proclaimed and heard in the Church.”

**Drink Christ so that you can drink the blood that redeemed you.
Drink Christ so you can drink in his words.**

**Let the luscious syrup of God’s word flood the veins of your mind,
and take possession of your heart.”**

After an appropriate period of silence, the Liturgy of the Word proceeds as usual, using the readings of the day.

- First Reading
- Psalm Response
- Second Reading
- Alleluia
- Gospel
- Homily
- Silent Reflection

PRESENTATION OF A BIBLE (OPTIONAL)

Presider: Would our catechumens and candidates please come forward?

The catechumens and candidates come forward, accompanied by their sponsors, and face the assembly, maintaining physical distance. They should be informed ahead of time where to stand. Each sponsor uses hand sanitizer before carrying a new Bible to present to the catechumen or candidate.

The priest addresses the catechumens and candidates.

As he says the first line, the sponsors present the Bible in a way that is clearly seen by the assembly.

**Presider: Catechumens and candidates, receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the
Son of God.**

INTERCESSIONS FOR THE CATECHUMENS AND CANDIDATES

The priest addresses the assembly:

**Presider: These catechumens and candidates, who are our sisters and
brothers, have already traveled a long road. We rejoice with them in
the gentle guidance of God, who has brought them to this day. Let
us pray that they may press onwards, until they come to share fully
in our way of life.**

Asst. Minister: That God our Father may reveal His Christ to them more and more with every passing day, let us pray to the Lord:

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Asst. Minister: That they may undertake with generous hearts and souls whatever God may ask of them, let us pray to the Lord:

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Asst. Minister: That they may have our sincere and unfailing support every step of the way, let us pray to the Lord:

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Asst. Minister: That they may find in our community compelling signs of unity and generous love, let us pray to the Lord:

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Asst. Minister: That their hearts and ours may become more responsive to the needs of others, let us pray to the Lord:

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Asst. Minister: That in due time, the catechumens may be found worthy to celebrate the baptism of new birth and renewal in the Holy Spirit, and the candidates may be found worthy to complete their initiation through the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist [or: to be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church], let us pray to the Lord:

All: Lord, hear our prayer.¹²

PRAYER OVER THE CATECHUMENS AND CANDIDATES

Presider: Please join me in blessing our catechumens and candidates [by extending both your hands in prayer over them].

All extend their hands in prayer over the catechumens and candidates.

Presider: Almighty God, source of all creation, you have made us in your image.

Receive with love those who come before you.

Lead our catechumens to the baptism of new birth,

and our candidates to a deeper share in the paschal mystery,

¹² Although RCIA 529 allows the general intercessions of the Mass to be inserted here, and even to omit the Creed after the catechumens are dismissed for “pastoral reasons” the decision to do this should be considered extraordinary, and should be well thought out.

**so that, living a fruitful life in the company of your faithful,
they may receive the eternal reward that you promise.**

We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord.

A: Amen.

DISMISSAL OF THE CATECHUMENS

A catechist takes the Lectionary, and joins the Catechumens.

Presider: My dear catechumens, this community now sends you forth to reflect more deeply on the word of God which you have shared with us today. Be assured of our loving support and prayers for you. We look forward to the day when you will share fully in the Lord's Table.

The catechist, carrying the Lectionary, leads the catechumens out to lead them in an extended reflection on the word. The candidates remain with the assembly.

Intercessory prayer is resumed with the usual general intercessions for the needs of the Church and the whole world; then, if required, the profession of faith is said (RCIA 529).

CREED AND PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

The Liturgy of the Eucharist proceeds as usual.