

What Is the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens?

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Greeting the small group standing at the threshold of the church, the priest is joyful in his welcome. He tells them of the Church's happiness that they are taking the next step in the process to become Christians.

These men and women have met for several weeks, months, or even years with members of the parish's Christian initiation team. At sessions during the first period of the Christian initiation process, their faith has been nurtured and they have come to know about Jesus Christ. During this stage they are considered *inquirers*.

Now, the inquirers are taking the next step as they proceed to what is called the Order of Catechumens. This step, the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens, marks the transition from being outside of the Church to inside. It signals a decisive step along the journey of faith.

During this rite, the priest will ask each person a question such as "What do you ask of the Church of God?" or "For what reason have you come?" To an answer such as "faith," may come the query, "What does faith offer you?" As the inquirers reply to these questions, they articulate their desire to cross the threshold of the church.

The priest explains that God has revealed himself to these individuals and that "the way of the Gospel" is before them. He encourages them "to walk in the light of Christ" and to commit their lives to his care. He also queries the catechumens' sponsors on whether they will be supportive. Their answer is important since faith is nourished through other disciples.

Once these affirmations have been given, the priest traces the cross on the forehead of the individuals. Touching each forehead, the priest states that Christ will provide the person with strength. After the forehead is signed, there is an option for the sponsor to sign the senses. As the ears, eyes, lips, heart, shoulders, hands, and feet are signed, it becomes apparent that the person is being asked to take on another life. With the signing of each sense, the priest notes how followers of Christ use that sense. "Receive the sign of the cross on your ears, that you may hear the voice of the Lord," he says with the first signing. The signing of the cross expresses that these individuals' entire bodies are being formed into Christian discipleship.



During the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens, the priest traces the Sign of the Cross on those entering the next stage of the Christian initiation process.

The catechumens are invited into the assembly for the Liturgy of the Word. After the homily, the catechumens may be presented with a book containing the Gospel. At some parishes, the catechumens are provided with Bibles and at other parishes, the Book of the Gospels might be presented as a sign of the Gospel that they are receiving.

The whole assembly now prays over the catechumens during a series of petitions. The petitions ask that the catechumens be encouraged, supported, and strengthened for discipleship.

After the intercessions, the catechumens are dismissed from the assembly to reflect with a catechist on the liturgy and the Word of God that they have just heard. With the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens, they have stepped over the threshold into the Church and are on the path to receiving the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. With this rite, they are walking the way of faith.

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