

# Journey OF Faith



## Welcome to the OCIA

It was the first day of OCIA class. Tanya, Terrence, Tomás, and Lisa didn't know what to expect.

"Hello!" Mrs. and Mr. Evans, their teachers, greeted them by the door.

"Hi," everyone replied shyly.

"Let's all get to know each other," said Mrs. Evans, smiling. "Who wants to share why they're here?"

"My mom told me I had to," Tomás said, chuckling.

"I don't know," Tanya said, shrugging.

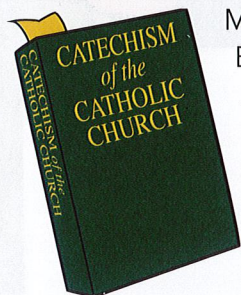
"It has to do with being Catholic," Lisa replied.



Mr. Evans nodded and said, "It does. By the end of class you'll all know exactly why you're here. And what OCIA has to do with being Catholic."



### Why are you in OCIA today?



Mr. Evans continued. "Mrs. Evans and I are your catechists. A **catechist** is someone who teaches you about religion using a book called a catechism. We'll use a book called the **Catechism of the Catholic Church** since you're here to

learn about being Catholic." Mr. Evans held up a huge book.

"We're not going to have to learn *all* that, are we?" Terrence asked. He looked shocked.

"No," Mr. Evans said, laughing. "That would be a lot! This class is just the beginning."

"Are these classes just for kids?" Tanya asked.

"Yes and no," said Mrs. Evans. "These classes are just for you. The process you're going through is for kids your age, teenagers, and adults. It's called the **Order of Christian Initiation of Adults**, or OCIA for short."

Lisa frowned and said, "But we're not adults."

"Actually, you are to the Church. The Catholic Church says people are adults if they can think for themselves and tell right from wrong or good from bad. Then you can decide to be Catholic. It's a big decision. That's why we have these classes. They get you ready for the rite."

"What's a rite?" Tanya asked.

"A **rite** is a serious religious ceremony," Mrs. Evans said. "This rite is Christian. That means it's



connected to Jesus Christ. The early Church used something a lot like this to initiate new Christians, too. Does anyone know what initiation means?"

"**Initiation** means to start something or what you go through to become part of a group," Lisa answered.



"Good!" Mrs. Evans said. "Right now, you're all thinking about becoming Catholic. But you're all coming from different places. Some of you have been to church before. Some of you went to a different church.

"Some of you were baptized when you were babies. Some of you are getting baptized when you become Catholic. If you're going to be baptized, you're called a **catechumen**. If you've already been baptized as a Christian, you'll be called a **candidate**."

"But no matter what you're called," Mr. Evans added, "you're all still working together."



### Will you be a catechumen or a candidate?

"You'll all go through four stages. The first one is called **inquiry**. To inquire means to ask questions. In this stage you get to ask questions about God and being Catholic. But don't worry! You can still have questions after inquiry.

"The second stage is called **catechumenate**. You'll learn about most of the major Catholic beliefs. You'll also find someone to help you on your journey. That person is called a **godparent** if you haven't been baptized. If you have, the person is a **sponsor**. This person can be a family member or a friend, but the person has to be a confirmed Catholic."

"What does a sponsor or godparent do?" asked Tanya.

"They're like your personal guide. You can ask them questions or talk to them about being Catholic when you aren't in class. They also make sure you take what we learn in class and use it every day.

"The third stage is called **purification and enlightenment**. This happens during Lent. What do you know about Lent?"

"My grandma says Lent is when we get ready for Easter," Tomás answered.

"Good! You will be getting ready for Easter. You'll also be getting ready to become fully Catholic. You clean up, or purify, the things that keep you from God. You also learn about God, God's love, and how to make God happy. That makes you enlightened."

"That sounds like a lot of work," Terrence said. "Why do we do all that?"



"Well, on the night before Easter, at a special Mass called the Easter Vigil, you receive the three **sacraments of initiation**: Baptism, Confirmation, and Communion. But you can't get a gift from someone you don't know. So you have to know God and invite him into your life first."

"So a sacrament is a present?"

"They certainly are a gift! **Sacraments** are visible, physical ways that we know God is with us even when we can't see him. **Baptism** takes away our sins and makes us members of the Church. **Communion**, also called the holy Eucharist, is when we receive the true Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. **Confirmation** is when the Holy Spirit comes to each of us in a special way. In some parishes you have to wait until you're a little older to be confirmed, but here you'll be confirmed along with the teenagers and adults. Does that make sense?"

Terrence nodded and said, "Kind of."

"Don't worry. It is complicated. That's why we'll discuss all seven sacraments one at a time. When the Easter Vigil gets here, you'll know everything you need to know."

"Just one more stage! After Easter, you'll start a stage called **mystagogy**. That means 'interpretation of mystery,' and we'll be uncovering even more about the mysteries of the sacraments, God's love for us, and how we can live our faith every day."



**Which part of the OCIA is most exciting to you?**

"We have a lot to learn," Mrs. Evans said, "so let's start at the very beginning. When you hear the word *Catholic*, what do you think of?"

Tomás had his hand up first. "I think of my grandma."

"I think of religion," said Lisa.

"Is the pope Catholic?" Tanya asked.

"Those are all good places to start," Mrs. Evans said. "Catholicism is a religion. That means all Catholics around the world share the same traditions, rituals, prayers, and set of beliefs. Catholics practice their religion by praying, going to Mass, celebrating the seven sacraments, reading the Bible and many other things. You'll learn more about all those things later."

"And you're right, Tanya, the pope is Catholic. In fact, the pope is the leader of the whole Church."



**What do you think of when you hear the word Catholic?**

"Before we leave, I just want to let you know that asking questions in this class is very important. So if you ever don't understand something, just ask! Does anyone have any questions before we go?"

"Is being Catholic better than being in other religions?" Tanya asked.

Tomás questioned, "Do kids have to be Catholic if their parents are?"

"What happens if I don't believe in something you teach us? Does that mean I can't be a Catholic?" Lisa wondered out loud.





# WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE ABOUT BEING CATHOLIC?

JOURNEY OF FAITH

## In Short

- OCIA is a time to ask questions about your faith.
- OCIA has four parts, or phases.
- OCIA is rooted in early Christian history.



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The process by which adults are initiated into the Catholic faith throughout the United States is now called the OCIA—the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults. “Order” is a clearer translation of the Latin term for the process formerly known as the RCIA—the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. People preparing for baptism and reception into the Church celebrate several rites as part of the order to which those rites belong—an order whose mission is to journey in the faith. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops adopted the name change in 2021, with American dioceses introducing the name thereafter. For more information, please contact your local diocese.

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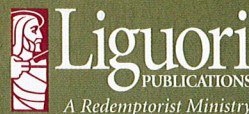
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