

August 2025

Dear Catechumen/Candidate,

Thank you for your interest in the OCIA (*Order of Christian Initiation of Adults*) program at St. Paul the Apostle Church. OCIA is the process established by the universal Church for individuals to become Catholic through receiving the *Sacraments of Initiation* – Baptism, Confirmation, and the Holy Eucharist. This initiation process also involves a parish community experiencing a renewal in faith as it prepares and welcomes new members into the Church.

The Rite speaks of conversion as a “spiritual journey.” Centered on fostering a deep relationship with Jesus and the Church he founded, this journey takes place through distinct stages over time suitable to bring about a thorough catechesis (passing on the truths of the faith), significant experience of the parish community, and commitment to the liturgical and moral life of the Catholic faith.

The OCIA process is a restoration of the ancient catechumenate, arising within the first three centuries following the apostles’ era. This was the early Church’s way of Christianizing the pagan Roman Empire. The Second Vatican Council called for the restoration and use of this venerable and powerful method of initiation for the worldwide Church (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 64).

The OCIA process may last a few months or years, depending on the individual’s needs and readiness. When a child is baptized, the Church expects that the child will be gradually initiated into the life of faith by his or her parents, godparents, and parish community. When an adult or older child enters the Church, they must go through OCIA to be properly catechized.

The following pages contain important information about baptisms, marriages, godparents, sponsors, etc. Please read these sections closely and contact the parish with any questions. It is best to ask questions now rather than waiting until the Easter Vigil approaches (a common time for reception into the Church), as you may not be able to be initiated into the Church.

This year, OCIA sessions begin on Sunday, 31 August 2025 and end on Sunday, 3 May 2026. We meet from 11:15 am to 1:00 pm in the Klinger Center. This room is the large gymnasium next to the Church. Please enter through door 23.

Through prayer, study, and conversation, we hope your journey will bring you to the fullness of the Catholic faith. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me ([sosborne@stpac.org](mailto:sosborne@stpac.org)).

Sincerely in Christ,



R. Scott Osborne  
OCIA Coordinator

## WHAT IS OCIA?

OCIA stands for the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults*, the process by which an adult (including a child age seven and older) is initiated into the Catholic Church through the reception of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist. Through this process, the adult is formed in the faith, with the local parish community serving as teachers and models of the faith.

OCIA has been around since the early Church as the process by which the Church prepared unbaptized adults to be received into the Church. The OCIA process was an intense study, prayer, and conversion period, often lasting up to three years. During the process, a sponsor would testify to the community about the individual's conversion, authenticity, and genuine readiness.

The Second Vatican Council revamped the OCIA process but, at the same time, retained the spirit of the communal participation of the whole Church. In keeping with the original practices of preparation, the base elements of study, prayer, community, and discernment remain integral. However, persons may enter the Church in a shorter timeframe based on his/her needs. While there are standards and measures to discern a person's spiritual disposition at various points throughout the process and, consequently, how long they may be in each phase, there is no absolute schedule for the time it takes to complete the OCIA process.

The decision to accept the faith, to become Catholic, or to complete initiation, must be the free will of each person. The Catholic Church does not use coercion, guilt, or any forms of manipulation to influence this decision.

Regardless of a person's age or circumstances, the Church is tasked with the duties, rights, and responsibilities to ensure that everyone 1) meets the requirements set out by the Code of Canon Law, and 2) publicly demonstrates the desire, readiness, and lifestyle that reflects acceptance and understanding of the Gospel and what it means to become a member of the Catholic Church.

OCIA is comprised of four phases and rituals. These follow the experiences of conversion and initiation into the Christian faith.

Inquiry is the beginning phase in which individuals first experience the hearing of God's Word and become aware of God's presence, love, and work in their lives. In this first awareness, one is getting to know who God is. It is the phase in which the first stirrings of faith in Jesus Christ begin. For one already baptized, it is a re-awakening of that awareness, the beginning of renewal, and the first intentional integration into the community of believers. The ritual that goes with this first stage is the *Rite of Acceptance* (for unbaptized) and the *Rite of Welcoming* (for baptized). These rites are for those who have indicated and given evidence of conversion and the desire to follow Christ through the Catholic Church.

Catechumenate is the "apprenticeship" phase of Christian discipleship – a time of training in the Christian life. This is accomplished through formal instruction in our faith's core teachings and beliefs (doctrines) and is experienced through liturgy, service, and parish community life. This approach aims for a thorough integration of the faith into each individual's life. The *Rite of Election* is the ritual that accompanies this phase. The *Rite of Election* is for the unbaptized who have given clear evidence of acquaintance and integration of the core teachings and beliefs and the desire to accept baptism. The *Call to Continuing Conversion* is the ritual for the baptized who also demonstrate acquaintance and integration of the core teachings and beliefs and desire to complete their initiation to come into full communion with the Catholic Church.

Enlightenment is the phase, indicated by its name, that points to an intense, inward reflection and discernment. In this phase, the candidate seeks to be purified in their intentions to follow Christ more fully, to recognize any sinful attachments or attitudes that still separate or diminish their relationship with Christ, and to receive the light they need to follow him more authentically.

With Mystagogia, the final phase, it is said that all the baptized faithful are continuing this phase because we are still reflecting on the story of Christ and still experiencing the conversion from our Christian initiation, regardless of when it occurred. The Mystagogia occurs strictly for the neophytes (newly baptized) and newly professed members between Easter and Pentecost. The Mystagogia period is like the story of the walk along the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). The disciples were so excited and filled with wonder telling the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection that they did not recognize it was Christ to whom they were speaking until the breaking of the bread. He helped them understand his story in relation to the Scriptures and all they had experienced. It is a time of reflection, celebration, and active participation in the life and mission of the Church.

### BEGINNING THE OCIA PROCESS

How do you know if or when it's time to begin OCIA? There is no perfect answer. Each person must discern the level of desire they feel and determine what their schedule can handle. As one progresses through the OCIA process, each phase calls for a more intense commitment, so one may need to go slower in one phase or another due to scheduling issues. We do not put an expiration date on this process or predetermine a date for *Initiation or Profession of Faith*.

Un-baptized: Have you felt a stirring or sense of something special moving your life? Have you wondered about the joy or peace you've witnessed in friends or family who practice their Christian faith? Are you tired of the mixed information that well-meaning people give about who Jesus is, and you want to know for yourself? Do you desire a life of purpose, blessing, and joy for yourself?

Baptized-only Catholic: Have you felt a calling to begin living your faith more deeply? Is the desire to know your faith and have your life changed by it becoming more persistent? Are you longing to experience the joy of the sacraments, Mass, and belonging to a Catholic faith community?

Baptized non-Catholic Christian: Have you had an experience with the Catholic Church, either through a person or event that has touched you? Are you interested in learning what Catholics believe and how they live their faith daily? Are you attracted to Catholic worship or teaching and desire to become part of this Church? Have you been attending Mass for some time but never been invited to become Catholic?

### BAPTISM

Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through baptism, we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ's mystical body, are incorporated into the Church, and made sharers in her mission: "Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water and in the word" (CCC 1213).

The Catholic Church teaches and professes one baptism for the remission of sin. To be valid, baptism must include the words: "[N.], I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," with three separate pourings of water (or immersions) at each name of the persons of the Holy Trinity.

Other Christian churches, such as the Orthodox and mainline Protestant churches, use the same Trinitarian formula with water for baptism as the Catholic Church. Therefore, once verified, the Catholic Church accepts those baptisms as valid. However, we must be morally certain that such a baptism occurred and will request documentation.

The Catholic Church does not “re-baptize” a person already validly baptized. A valid baptism may only occur once in a person’s life because of the indelible spiritual mark or character imprinted on the person’s soul. This mark cannot be removed, repeated, or forgotten. It consecrates the baptized person for Christian worship. Therefore, we will only baptize a person if it is determined that they were either 1) never baptized or 2) were baptized using a formula not recognized by the Church.

### **MARITAL STATUS**

Discussing your marital status (former, current, and future) will be necessary during the OCIA intake process. Complete honesty is essential to ensuring that one’s sacramental life, present or future, begins on the right track or will be redirected, if necessary.

For inquirers who are currently married, we will inquire into the current marriage at the time their vows were made and any prior failed marriages. This includes marriages witnessed by non-Catholic ministers or civil authorities.

For individuals or couples with one or more prior marriages who are remarried, any past/current marriages must be reviewed to determine if an annulment or convalidation is required. Any annulments or convalidations must begin immediately and be completed before the *Rite of Election/Call to Continuing Conversion*.

For those engaged and seeking to be received into the Church, their and their future spouses’ complete marital history will be reviewed. If a formal petition is required, this process could take at least a year to complete. Other annulment forms usually take less time, depending on individual circumstances and the timelines of submitting all documents. It is not the intention of the Church to cause worry or burden but to ensure the road to full initiation is clear of any impediments.

### **REQUIRED DOCUMENTS**

A baptized, non-Catholic will need to provide a copy of proof of their baptism.

A person baptized in the Catholic Church must provide a new baptism certificate from the parish where they were baptized, and this certificate must be dated within six months of the parish office receiving it. An unbaptized person must produce a copy of their birth certificate/adoption decree with the parents’ names on either document.

### **SPONSOR/GODPARENT**

The ideal sponsor/godparent is mature in their faith and active in the parish to connect their candidate or catechumen to the life of the parish. Those interested in becoming an OCIA sponsor/godparent must (cf. Canon 893):

- § Be at least 16 years old,
- § Be fully initiated in the Catholic Church,
- § Not be the spouse, parent or guardian of the intended participant,
- § Not have previous marriages, or, if married, it must have witnessed by a priest or deacon.

All sponsors/godparents, including St. Paul parishioners, will complete a statement indicating they are aware of and meet the requirements, and are active parishioners in good standing. This form will become part of the Church record. The role of the sponsor/godparent is to both support and witness the person's conversion and readiness to receive the sacraments. This is accomplished by attending the OCIA sessions, rites, and events with the inquirer while offering encouragement, listening, praying, and being an excellent Christian example outside the Church.

The sponsor/godparent is the connection to the parish. Therefore, his/her participation in parish life is essential. The sponsor/godparent introduces the inquirer to fellow parishioners, invites them to parish events, and meets with the candidate for one-on-one support.

It is common for inquirers to experience periods of uncertainty throughout the process. They may be challenged in their beliefs or moral attitudes by the new information they are receiving. The sponsor/godparent is there to encourage them to learn more and to pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance.

To this end, OCIA sessions are designed with the inquirer's needs as the priority, to help them in seeking information, and in discerning if God is calling them to live as Catholics. Therefore, for sponsors and godparents, incessant talking, preaching, "over-sharing," and dominating small group discussions is inappropriate. Quiet listening and time-sensitive sharing is the key.

The other aspect of a support role is recognizing and identifying the rich diversity of spirituality in the Church. This means encouraging the inquirer to investigate how Catholics worship, pray, learn, and enrich their faith.

Not every person who begins the OCIA process is received into the Church. This is due to several possible reasons, including excessive absences, the decision to hold off or quit, or unresolved marital issues. Some may be received into the Church later, and others not. There is no expectation that any inquirer will choose to be initiated into the Church. This is a decision that must be made with absolute freedom. Sponsors/godparents are to provide the encouragement and support that an individual needs to freely choose what they believe God is asking of them, regardless of where the decision takes them. We are here to support them in the discernment process by providing the truth of our faith, the reality of what it means to be Catholic, praying for and with them, and welcoming them to be with us regardless of the outcome.

A sponsor/godparent to someone who is received into the Church or completes their initiation is connected to this person throughout their life. The role continues as one of encouragement and example. The inquirer may need to be re-introduced to fellow parishioners and ministry leaders and invited to learn about the different opportunities of the parish. Staying in touch throughout the first year is expected; this is a year of many firsts and one that the neophyte will need to feel welcomed. A special relationship will have taken place by this time; it is one to celebrate.



