

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 catechumens (those who have not been baptized) are preparing 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.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE RITE

The structure of the Combined Rite is:

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

The inquirers, their sponsors “and a group of the faithful,” (including the candidates and their sponsors) gather outside the church. The priest goes to meet them, as the assembly sings a 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 on the forehead, as well as all the senses, and their hands and feet. 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.

2. 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 (or the Book of the Gospels)

A book containing the gospels is presented to the catechumens and candidates.

Intercessions for the Catechumens and Candidates

A litany of prayer is prayed for the catechumens and candidates.

Prayer Over the Catechumens and Candidates

Dismissal of the Catechumens (and Candidates)

The catechumens (and candidates) are dismissed from the assembly with a catechist, signifying that their formation in the Word has begun.

3. The Liturgy of the Eucharist

The Liturgy of the Eucharist proceeds as usual.

1. Receiving the Inquirers and Candidates

The inquirers and their sponsors, gather “outside the church.”¹

Instead of the customary procession of ministers to the front during the gathering song, consider having the priest and other ministers gather with the assembly and simply take their places before it is time to begin.

Leave the main doors to the church open. Be sure a microphone (preferably cordless) is available, so that the responses of the inquirers and candidates can be heard clearly.

When it is time to begin, an appropriate gathering song begins. All stand, and the priest, along with the deacon or lector carrying the book of the gospels, a minister carrying the processional cross, 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.

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, however, is one of the assembly going out to greet these newcomers. This will need to be adapted in each parish, as some more contemporary churches have commons or plazas ideally suited to the rite; others are limited to a crowded vestibule. In smaller assemblies, it may be quite possible to lead the entire assembly to the commons, the plaza, or a parish hall.

Use as your inspiration here the solemn procession on Passion Sunday. If it is impractical for the assembly to process out, is there a way to gather at least a representative part of your assembly outside the church for this rite, and then lead them into the Church with the catechumens at the appropriate time?

Presider: The Lord be with you.

A: And with your spirit.

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.

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.

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

He turns to the inquirers.

Greeting

Presider: Who seeks entrance into this faith community?

A member of the RCIA Team answers:

T: 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:

OPENING DIALOGUE

The inquirers are named.

As each is named, he or she steps forward. Then, their sponsor comes forward from the group of faithful gathered at the entrance, and joins her or him. The sponsor brings the inquirer to the priest, who asks the inquirer:

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

I: Faith.³

Presider: What does faith offer you?

I: Eternal life.

The priest greets the inquirer as the assembly sings:

A: We stand with you, we pray for you, O holy child of God!⁴

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.

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

This process is repeated for each inquirer.⁵ When all the inquirers have been presented, the catechist continues:

C: 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. At the same time, the sponsor comes forward from the group of faithful gathered at the entrance, and joins the candidate. 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:

⁴ Although not called for in the rite, a sung welcome by the assembly certainly creates a sense of welcome. This sung response may be found in David Haas' *Who Calls You by Name: Music for Christian Initiation* (GIA, 1988).

⁵ The rite does allow, if there is a large number of inquirers, that the questions may be asked only once of all 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 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?⁶

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?

⁶ Other options for the acceptance of the Gospel may be found in RCIA, 52.

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.

With hands joined, the priest prays/sings⁷:

**Presider: God 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.**

⁷ This affirmation of the assembly and the following signing of the senses is the central element of this rite. Consider singing it. A good setting of the entire text can be found in *Who Calls You by Name: Music for Christian Initiation*.

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

If the arrangement is such that visibility is poor, consider reprising the gathering song at this point, and leading the inquirers and candidates into the midst of the assembly, taking care to keep inquirers and candidates clearly distinguished.⁸ 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 catechumens come one by one to the celebrant; with his thumb he traces a cross on the forehead.

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.

A: Christ will be your strength! Learn to know and follow him!⁹

The sponsors stand in front of the inquirers. As the priest says each prayer, the sponsor traces the cross over the inquirer as indicated.

⁸ Instead of bringing them up to the sanctuary, perhaps you could position the inquirers in the center aisle, with the assembly facing toward them. 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.

⁹ Various sung settings will have different responses for the assembly. Even if the prayer is spoken, the rite prefers that the assembly's response is sung.

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

A: Christ will be your ...

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

A: Christ will be your...

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

A: Christ will be your...

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

A: Christ will be your...

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

A: Christ will be your...

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

A: Christ will be your...

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

A: Christ will be your...

Without touching them, the priest makes the sign of the cross over all the catechumens at once¹⁰, 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.

A: Amen.

SIGNING OF THE CANDIDATES WITH THE CROSS

He turns to the 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; with his thumb he traces a cross on the forehead. . As the priest says the prayer, the sponsor traces the cross on the candidates' forehead.¹¹

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

A: Christ will be your strength! Learn to know and follow him!

¹⁰ 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)

¹¹ 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).

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.¹²**

A: 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.¹³**

2. The Liturgy of the Word

The gathering song may be repeated here, or another appropriate song sung, as the assembly leads the catechumens and candidates into the church for the liturgy of the word, led by the cross bearer. The deacon or lector, carrying the Book of the Gospels, followed by the priest, are the last in the procession. When the Book of the Gospels is placed on the altar, the song ends, and everyone is seated. Then the priest addresses the catechumens and candidates again in these or similar words¹⁴:

¹² Another option for this prayer is found in RCIA, 57.

¹³ If you've already brought them into the Church, you might say, "join us now and..."

¹⁴ 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

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

the priest “speaks to them briefly, helping them to understand the dignity of God’s word, which is proclaimed and heard in the Church.”

**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

Presider: Would our Catechumens and candidates please come forward?

The catechumens and candidates come forward, accompanied by their sponsors, and face the assembly. Each sponsor carries a new Bible to present to the catechumen or candidate.

The priest joins the assembly, and 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.**

All stand as they respond in song:

A: All God's children, all Christ's people, all you saints, receive this word! Claim the gift, the faith, the promise, build the body of the Lord.¹⁵

INTERCESSIONS FOR THE CATECHUMENS AND CANDIDATES¹⁶

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.

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

A: Lord, hear our prayer.

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

A: Lord, hear our prayer.

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

A: Lord, hear our prayer.

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

A: Lord, hear our prayer.

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

¹⁵ "Build the Body of the Lord" by Lori True (© 2007, GIA Publications). Of course this is just one of many appropriate sung responses.

¹⁶ Even if it is not your usual custom to sing intercessions, consider singing them for this rite.

A: Lord, hear our prayer.

M: 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:

A: Lord, hear our prayer.¹⁷

PRAYER OVER THE CATECHUMENS

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.

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,

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.

¹⁷ Although RCIA 68 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.

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.

A: May the word of God strengthen you; may the word of God nourish you; may the word of God comfort you all your life.¹⁸

As the assembly repeats the sung refrain, 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.

Once they have left, the priest concludes the Liturgy of the Word with the

CREED AND PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL

3. The Liturgy of the Eucharist

The Liturgy of the Eucharist proceeds as usual.

¹⁸ This response by Christopher Walker (*Celtic Mass*, OCP, 1996) is designed to be used for the weekly dismissal of Catechumens, so it's natural to use it here. Of course, other sung responses are available and appropriate.