

BECOMING CATHOLIC

(Order of Christian Initiation of Adults)

Frequently Asked Questions



St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

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Jesus spoke to them saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 8:12

Each year on Holy Saturday during the Easter Vigil, thousands of men, women, and children are received into the Roman Catholic Church in the United States. Parishes welcome these new Catholics through the ***Order of Christian Initiation of Adults*** (OCIA.). Below are some questions and answers about our “*Becoming Catholic*” (OCIA) process here at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish.

What is the OCIA?

The OCIA is a process of initiation into the Roman Catholic community of faith for persons who are experiencing a conversion in their lives and seeking either Christian baptism in the Roman Catholic Church or, if already baptized, full communion with the Catholic tradition. It is a process which fosters the study of Scripture, Catholic teaching and practice, Christian values and morality, the development and deepening of a life of prayer and action with the support and involvement of our parish community. The OCIA is more than a course of instruction. It is a process of conversion, designed to meet the unique needs of the participants.

Who is OCIA for?

Our **Order of Christian Initiation of Adults** is a journey of faith particularly geared toward:

- those who were never baptized
- those who were baptized in another faith tradition but now want to explore membership into the Roman Catholic Church
- those who were baptized Catholic but never received the other sacraments of initiation (Eucharist and Confirmation)
- anyone wanting to learn more about the Catholic Church

May the church be the place of God's mercy and love, where everyone can feel themselves welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live according to the good life of the Gospel. And in order to make others feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged, the church must have open doors so that all might enter .”

(Pope Francis)

How much time is involved?

Here at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish, participants are invited to engage in a year-long discernment process. It may be longer for some participants depending on their level of discernment and readiness. It is important to realize that Christians are made, not born. There is nothing automatic or instant in the process of becoming Catholic. The development of faith takes time and cannot be rushed. Because of this, participating in the OCIA is much more than going to a class on Catholicism. Although doctrinal instruction is part of the formation process, spiritual growth is equally important as we come closer to God by becoming a disciple of Christ, with the help of the Holy Spirit. Candidates must be allowed sufficient time for their faith to ripen as they come to better understand the beliefs and practices of the Roman Catholic Church and are exposed to the sacramental and community life of the parish. Consequently, making this faith journey and discerning whether this is the right path for you should not be rushed. There is no obligation on the part of those who enter the OCIA process to ultimately become Catholic. The decision is always yours!

Schedule

Those inquiring into the Catholic Church who have never been baptized, baptized in a different faith tradition, or baptized Catholic but never completed their initiation into the full sacramental life of the Church through reception of the sacraments of Eucharist and Confirmation are invited to participate in OCIA sessions. These sessions are offered on **Thursday evenings (6:00-8:00 p.m.) beginning in mid-September and running through the May.**

Is there a charge?

Participants in our *Becoming Catholic* process are provided weekly hospitality and a textbook, *This is Our Faith*. Various handouts and other materials are also distributed throughout the process. A fee of \$75.00 is welcome to help cover the cost of these and other associated materials.

Do I need to come to every session?

Obviously, there will be times when people must miss a session due to illness, travel, business, family, or other emergencies. But it is important to remember that this is a commitment. When participants must be absent, they should let the Director know. Frequent absences make it difficult to keep abreast of what is discussed or have enough information to make an informed decision about membership in the Catholic Church. Excessive absences may necessitate the postponement of the reception of sacraments.

What if I don't understand the material?

Any question you might have should be asked ... at any time. It is likely that someone else has the same question, but is reluctant to ask it. Team members, clergy, presenters, and sponsors are available to explain whatever you may not understand.

I am baptized Catholic and received 1st Communion, but not Confirmation. Is the OCIA for me?

No ... in this situation you would become part of our Welcome Home ministry. This 8-session program meets on Tuesday evenings from 6:30-8:00 p.m. and is designed to answer your questions, grow in your faith, receive appropriate adult-based formation leading to the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation. Two 8-session modules are offered throughout the course of the year (one in the Fall; one in the Spring). For more information, contact Marcie Wilske at 702-804-8370 or mwilske@seaslv.org.

I am baptized Catholic, but have not received 1st Communion or Confirmation. Is the OCIA for me?

Yes! You would become part of the regular OCIA sessions.

I was baptized Methodist, Baptist, etc. Must I be re-baptized in order to join the Roman Catholic Church?

Candidates seeking full Communion within the Roman Catholic Church will not be baptized again (unless their baptism was performed in a church community not recognized by the Roman

Catholic Church). They will simply make a Profession of Faith at the Easter Vigil and receive the sacraments of Eucharist and Confirmation.

What does a typical OCIA session look like?

Since the focus of our OCIA is formation and information, our sessions typically include prayer, instruction, sponsor-participant faith sharing, group discussion, fellowship and laughter!

What if I decide this isn't the right time?

There is never any pressure to complete the OCIA process and be received into the Roman Catholic Church. The decision is always yours. You are welcome to "re-engage" the process anytime!

What are godparents?

Godparents are practicing Catholics who are willing to model and share their Catholic faith with those who are yet baptized. Since godparents lend support, provide direction and answer questions they are an integral part of the discernment process and must be willing to accompany the candidate on their journey of faith.

What are sponsors?

Like the godparent, a sponsor is a practicing Catholic who serves as a mentor and companion to those who have already been baptized. Your sponsor should be someone with whom you feel comfortable discussing matters of faith and sharing your faith journey. The sponsor would ideally join you at OCIA sessions in order to lend support and provide guidance.

"I will go peaceably and firmly to the Catholic Church: for if faith is so important to our salvation, I will seek it where true faith first began, seek it among those who received it from God Himself."

(St. Elizabeth Ann Seton)

What are the requirements for being a godparent or sponsor?

Because the godparent/sponsor serves also as a representative of the faith community, church (canon) law requires that he/she fulfill certain criteria:

- He/she must be a practicing Catholic.
- He/she must be over 16 years of age and have themselves received the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation).
- He/she must be living in harmony with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church (not cohabitating, in a valid marriage, etc.).
- He/she cannot be the parents of the seeker.

What if I don't know any Catholic well enough to ask the person to be my godparent or sponsor?

Don't worry! Members of our faith community are available as parish sponsors and godparents. This should not discourage anyone from participating in our OCIA. Pairing seekers with a suitable sponsor, if necessary, is one of the jobs of the OCIA team.

Can a fiancé, spouse, or friend act as my sponsor?

The answer is "Yes," as long as this person meets the criteria established by church law as outlined above.

When are people received into the Church?

If a person is faithful to the process and, after adequate preparation and prayer, discerns to accept membership into the Roman Catholic Church, he/she is officially initiated at the Easter Vigil, the night before Easter Sunday.

Why does having a previous marriage prevent people from entering the Church? Why is an annulment of the previous marriage necessary?

Catholics must be free to marry in the Catholic Church. If a previous marriage ended in divorce, but no annulment was obtained, then the person is not free to remarry in the Catholic Church. An annulment does not mean that the previous marriage did not exist, but that it was not sacramentally valid in the eyes of the Church. For someone from another faith who wants to become Catholic, that person needs to be in “good standing” in the eyes of the Catholic Church; for a married person, this means living currently in a marriage recognized by the Church as valid. So any previous marriages on the part of either spouse would first have to be annulled. There are a variety of circumstances that could cause a marriage to be invalid in the eyes of the Catholic Church. Individuals in these circumstances should contact Deacon Steve Doucet (sdoucet@seaslv.org) or one of our priests to discuss their particular situation.

What is a “convalidation” and who needs it?

Convalidation is the “sacramentalizing” of a marriage. A Catholic is required by church (canon) law to marry in a Catholic ceremony. If a Catholic married in a civil marriage or in the church of another Christian faith without seeking and receiving a “dispensation” (a waiving of the requirement) prior to the wedding, the marriage needs to be convalidated by exchanging vows in the church, before a priest and two witnesses.

How do I register?

If you are interested in pursuing our OCIA or have other questions about becoming Catholic, contact Marcie Wilske at 702-804-8370 or mwilske@seaslv.org or Deacon Steve Doucet at 702-804-8360 or sdoucet@seaslv.org. You can also go to our parish website: www.seaslv.org and look for the *Becoming Catholic* (OCIA) link provided under the title “Faith Formation For All Ages.”

“If you search for God honestly and sincerely, you will find Him ... For Yahweh, your God is a merciful God and will not desert you.”