

LIGUORI CHRISTIAN INITIATION PROGRAM

# Journey of Faith



FOR ADULTS



CATECHUMENATE

LEADER GUIDE



# Journey of Faith



FOR ADULTS

CATECHUMENATE LEADER GUIDE



**Liguori**  
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Third Edition

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## The Catechumenate: A Period and a Process

Since the time of the early Church, generally “the catechumenate” referred to the entire process of Christian conversion and initiation. It spanned multiple years and involved formal instruction, acts of penitence, and public rites that confirmed the community’s approval as well as the catechumen’s changed status.

Today, the term *catechumenate*, and *catechumen* in some respects, refers to a specific stage within the typical RCIA process. The rite of acceptance has been called a “first step” even though most participants take part in a period of inquiry as well as unknown years of personal discernment before contacting a Catholic parish (RCIA 42). And while the rite of election technically “closes the period of the catechumenate proper,” catechumens (then the *elect*) and candidates continue to meet for months and have not yet been fully initiated (RCIA 118; see also *National Statutes for the Catechumenate*, 6).

The period of the catechumenate remains at the heart of the RCIA process. Team members, catechists, and participants should take advantage of all its benefits and allow it to progress naturally. Especially when an inquirer enters the process later than others, Lent arrives early, or there are exceptional circumstances, it may be best to extend the length of this period rather than rushing through or shortchanging the participant’s needs and experiences.

While the catechumenate is distinctly reserved for more formal instruction and presentation of essential doctrine, it is also a time for participants to practice and apply their faith. The Church identifies four goals for the catechumenate (RCIA 75). During this period, participants will:

1. receive a “suitable catechesis...planned to be gradual and complete in its coverage....This catechesis leads the catechumens not only to an appropriate acquaintance with dogmas and precepts but also to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation...” (see also Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity Church [*Ad Gentes*], 14, from the Second Vatican Council).
2. “become familiar with the Christian way of life..., learn to turn more readily to God in prayer,... and to practice love of neighbor, even at the cost of self-renunciation.”
3. participate in “suitable liturgical rites, which purify the catechumens little by little and

strengthen them with God’s blessing....At Mass they may also take part with the faithful in the Liturgy of the Word, thus better preparing themselves for their eventual participation in the liturgy of the Eucharist.”

4. “learn how to work actively with others to spread the Gospel and build up the Church....”

Throughout the catechumenate, catechumens and candidates will undergo “a progressive change of outlook and morals” (AG 13). RCIA leaders and sponsors can be catalysts for this spiritual transformation by providing opportunities for reflection, interaction with the community, and by supporting their study with clear and accurate information. Many features of the *Journey of Faith* program and materials assist you in achieving those goals.

Prior to the rite of election, leaders, sponsors, and participants themselves should observe an increase in the participant’s understanding and ownership of his or her Catholic Christian faith. The signing of names into the *Book of the Elect* signifies the fuller “yes” to Christ and Church that began in his or her heart at the rite of acceptance.

### Rites Belonging to the Catechumenate

#### Celebrations of the Word of God

The catechumenate, indeed the entire RCIA process, is connected intrinsically to the liturgical year. The Church’s recommendation that the RCIA process last at least one year is to ensure that catechumens experience the fullness of the paschal mystery as reflected in the liturgy.

Many RCIA groups attend the Sunday Liturgy of the Word together. Others meet during the week to proclaim and reflect on the upcoming readings. You may combine these celebrations with the catechetical sessions or keep them separate. However you structure your RCIA process, maintaining a connection to the seasons of the Church year and regularly, prayerfully breaking open the Scriptures is vitally important. *The Word Into Life*—available in three volumes for Sunday Cycles A, B, and C—provides the full text of the readings along with commentaries and questions for an RCIA audience.

## Model for a Celebration of the Word of God

1. *Song*. The celebration opens with an appropriate hymn or chant.
2. *Readings and Responsorial Psalm*. A baptized member, ideally a trained lector, proclaims a reading or two from Scripture. As in Mass, the first or Old Testament readings are followed by a psalm, either sung or in call-and-response format.
3. *Homily*. The RCIA director, pastor, or another trained homilist or catechist briefly explains and applies the readings.
4. *Concluding Rites*. The celebration closes with a prayer or one or more of the optional rites below (RCIA 85–89).

## Optional Rites

Catechumens and candidates can be nourished by other liturgical rites during this period. The Church offers texts and guidelines for minor exorcisms (petitions for strength in the challenges of faith and struggle against temptation), blessings, and anointings, which may occur on their own or conclude a celebration of the word (RCIA 90–103). Speak to your priest or deacon about when and how these might benefit your particular group.

Also, you will need to determine what rites are appropriate for the period of enlightenment and how they will fit into the weeks leading up to the Easter Vigil. The presentations of the Creed and Lord's Prayer can be moved to late in the catechumenate if necessary, but the priest, deacon, or DRE should ensure that the catechumens are ready beforehand. If the rites of election and/or calling are celebrated by the bishop elsewhere in the diocese, both the parish and participants will benefit from the *rite of sending*. In this rite, the local pastor and community preliminarily approve and celebrate the participants' readiness (see RCIA 106–17, 434–45, 530–46). It demonstrates their present, though distant, love and support and strengthens the catechumens and candidates for their return and entrance into the Lenten season.

## The Rite of Election

The rite of election is a major milestone in the catechumens' RCIA journey. Usually occurring on the First Sunday of Lent, catechumens publicly pledge their fidelity to the Church and sign the *Book of the Elect*. Baptized candidates participate in the *rite of calling the candidates to continuing conversion* or in a combined rite. These rites are very similar but do not include any signing.

The *Journey of Faith* program provides a basic outline to the rite of election in lesson C1 and spiritual preparation through Scripture and reflection in lesson E1: *Election: Saying Yes to Jesus*.

"Before the rite of election the bishop, priests, deacons, catechists, godparents, and the entire community [should] arrive at a judgment about the catechumens' state of formation and progress" (RCIA 121). This doesn't mean an interview or exam is needed; however, pastors who have not attended the RCIA sessions may want to speak to you briefly about the group.

This is a good time to gather the team members' and sponsors' feedback and experiences with the catechumens. Recording and sharing particularly meaningful input or stories can serve as a testimony to the individual's faith as well as to the power of the Spirit working in and through your parish RCIA.

The bishop ordinarily admits catechumens and candidates to their respective rites and presides at the ceremony. Whether or not the rite of election is celebrated in your parish, encourage all team members, sponsors, and close family and friends to attend. Prepare the catechumens by reviewing the steps or rehearsing the responses ahead of time. The steps of the rite are listed below.

1. The rite, held within a Mass, begins with the Liturgy of the Word.
2. After the homily, the celebrant calls the catechumens forward by name, along with their godparents.
3. He addresses the assembly and asks the godparents if these men and women are "worthy to be admitted" (RCIA 131). He asks if they have "sufficiently prepared...faithfully listened to God's word...[and] responded." The godparents answer, "They have."
4. He asks the catechumens if they wish to enter the Church. They answer, "We do."
5. After their names are signed in the *Book of the Elect*, the celebrant declares that they are members of the elect. He exhorts them to remain faithful and "to reach the fullness of truth" and their godparents to continue their "loving care and example" (RCIA 133).
6. The community offers intercessions for the elect.
7. The celebrant prays over the elect and dismisses them before continuing with the Liturgy of the Eucharist.



## C2: The Sacraments: An Introduction

**Catechism:** 1084, 1087, 1113–34, 1210–12, 1420–21, 1533–35

### Objectives

Participants will...

- describe a sacrament as a tangible sign and manifestation of divine love and presence.
- distinguish between the seven sacraments of the Church and other divine encounters.
- classify the sacraments according to the *Catechism's* categories of Initiation, Healing, and Service.
- identify Christ as instituting the sacraments and the Church as their proper minister.

### Leader Meditation

*Matthew 28:16–20*

Jesus promises, “I am with you always, until the end of the age.” Through the sacraments, the Lord is visibly present in the Church and in our lives. Each sacrament we receive increases both the Lord’s presence and our own awareness of that presence. Ask yourself, “What makes the sacraments unique? How do I value them in my daily life?”

### Related Catholic Updates

- “Sacraments: It All Starts with Jesus” (C9308A)
- “Sacraments of Initiation: God’s ‘I Love You’” (C0904A)
- “What Are Sacraments?” (C9508A)

### Leader Preparation

- Read the lesson, this lesson plan, the opening Scripture, and the *Catechism* sections.
- Be familiar with the following vocabulary terms: sacrament, grace. Definitions are provided in the lesson as well as in this guide’s glossary.
- Be aware that catechumens do not receive the sacraments in the same sequence as cradle Catholics, and that candidates may have experienced or may perceive certain sacraments in a different way.
- Invite the hospitality team to do something special that fits with this lesson’s message. Flowers, candy, or other inexpensive gifts would demonstrate that outward signs *really do* express invisible realities—like the parish’s ongoing support and care.

### Welcome

Greet the participants and sponsors as they gather. Check for supplies and immediate needs. Invite each person to share one event on his or her timeline of faith, if this activity was not completed during the previous session. Then invite them to share their experiences of and reactions to the rite of acceptance and/or welcoming. Begin promptly.

### Opening Scripture

*Matthew 28:16–20*


Light the candle and read the passage aloud. Ask the participants to name ways that Jesus is with us, both individually and as a Church. Explain that the sacraments are the unique and ultimate means by which Christ’s grace and saving actions enter our lives and strengthen our faith. Their visible and tangible signs serve as proof of God’s eternal love and presence.

Sacraments are “powers that come forth” from the body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving. They are actions of the Holy Spirit at work in his body, the Church.

CCC 1116







# Journey of Faith

C2  
CATECHUMENATE

**In Short:**

- A sacrament is a visible sign of God's grace.
- The seven sacraments fall into three categories.
- Christ instituted the sacraments and made the Church their minister.

The following Scripture readings will show you a few of the ways Jesus used the physical world to help his followers understand his profound love for them. As you read, list the way each reading shows this.

Matthew 8:1–3	Mark 10:13–16
Luke 9:12–17	John 9:6–7
John 11:35–36	John 13:4–5
John 20:21–22	

**What Is a Sacrament?**

In the broadest sense, a sacrament can be any person, event, or thing through which we encounter or experience God's presence in a new or deeper way. A sunset, a period of quiet prayer, a storm, the birth of a child, an intimate conversation with a close friend—all have the potential for revealing God to us in new and deeper ways.

In the broad sense, then, we can say that a sacramental experience is an encounter with God through human experience that somehow changes us. Virtually any human experience can provide us with such an encounter.

**The Sacraments:  
An Introduction**

*How do you communicate your love to someone? We're physical beings living in a physical world, so we communicate in physical ways. We experience life through our senses, and we communicate through our senses, too.*

We can experience love, and love is real, but it's not a physical object. Our expressions of love aren't the same as love, but we communicate our love through them. Words, gestures, and physical objects become *signs* of our love.

Jesus realized that as physical beings, we need physical signs to comprehend the incredible reality of his love. When Christ uses physical signs—symbols we can sense and observe—to work in us, the Church calls it a **sacrament**.

ADULTS

CCC 1084, 1087, 1113–34, 1210–12, 1420–21, 1533–35

## How Does Jesus Communicate Love?

Share these responses with participants as needed:

- Matthew 8:1–3 “[Jesus] stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, ‘I will do it. Be made clean.’” Christ used the laying on of hands and words of invocation to manifest healing.
- Mark 10:13–16 “Then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hands on them.” Jesus welcomed children into fellowship and blessed them through physical touch and embrace.

- Luke 9:12–17 “Then taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing over them, broke them, and gave them to the disciples...” Jesus multiplied food and fed a crowd using prayer and the distribution of material gifts. This directly correlates to the Eucharist.
- John 9:6–7 “[Jesus] spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on his eyes, and said to him, ‘Go wash...’ So he went and washed, and came back able to see.” Jesus effected healing and restored sight through a physical washing with water.

- John 11:35–36 “And Jesus wept.” Jesus demonstrated his love for his friends (us) through natural human emotions.
- John 13:4–5 “[Jesus] took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet...” Jesus physically demonstrated his servant leadership in this act. In his time, one might offer water for washing as a sign of hospitality or welcome, but to wash others was a sign of humility, even servitude. It also may represent purification.
- John 20:21–22 “[Jesus] breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the holy Spirit.’” The Holy Spirit is often conveyed as breath or wind. It recalls the breath and wind of life present in creation (Genesis 1:2, 2:7).

Clarify the meanings of *sign* and *symbol*. Begin with familiar examples, perhaps asking participants for a few. For instance, road signs help us navigate through a complex traffic system. However, simply putting up a sign won’t create a lane or intersection—worse, putting up the *wrong* sign could cause confusion or injury. The sign must clearly and accurately convey the underlying truth. *This role of signs and symbols in our pursuit of knowledge and truth is of great importance.*

## Sacraments Are Expressions of God's Grace

Explain that "Grace is a participation in the life of God" (CCC 1997). The *Catechism* describes different types of grace (CCC 1996–2005): *sanctifying grace*, sometimes called *justifying* or *habitual grace*, which is necessary for heaven; *actual graces*, which are individual acts of God that help and strengthen us; *sacramental graces*, "gifts proper to the different sacraments"; and *special graces*, or *charisms*, which serve the common good and benefit the whole Church (CCC 2003, 799–801).

### CATECHUMENATE

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## Sacraments Are Expressions of God's Grace

In the fifth century, St. Augustine defined *sacrament* as "a visible sign of invisible grace." To understand sacrament, we also need to understand what **grace** means. Grace is the gift of God's love and presence into which we grow. It's "the help God gives us to respond to our vocation to become his adopted sons and daughters." God's "initiative of grace precedes, prepares, and elicits our free response in faith and commitment" (*United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, glossary, p. 514).

Grace is a relationship between God and us. Our side of the relationship develops gradually, but it's a response to a love that was always there. The gift of God's grace is totally free and ever present. What we do with that gift is ours to choose, and our eternal salvation is affected by our choice. We express and celebrate our acceptance of it in the sacraments.

• Reflect on a way God has loved you through another person, a specific event, or physical object.

• Give an example of how God has used you to show his love to others.

## Jesus as Sacrament

Those who first followed Jesus encountered God and God's presence in a new way through his human presence. Jesus was, for them—and is for us—the sacrament of God. In Jesus, we encounter God and God's presence. Jesus is the one great sacrament through which all other sacraments make sense.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth."

John 1:1, 14

• How have you encountered God's presence and love for you through Jesus?

## The Church as Sacrament

In reflecting on this special relationship, the Church discovered its unique vocation: just as Jesus used his physical body to carry out the Father's mission, the Church uses its human members (the Mystical Body) as an instrument of salvation—as "sacraments" for the world. Sacraments are physical expressions of spiritual realities. As the body of Christ on earth, the Church is called to be a physical sign of the spiritual reality of Christ's ongoing presence in the world.

• How is your local parish community a sign of Christ's love to others?

## What Are the Seven Sacraments?

The official seven sacraments of the Catholic Church are baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance and reconciliation, anointing of the sick, matrimony, and holy orders. They are commonly grouped under three headings:

### Sacraments of Initiation

These sacraments celebrate and introduce us to the experience of the Christian life. While most Catholics receive these in separate ceremonies over several years, catechumens are initiated in one combined rite at the Easter Vigil.

## What Are the Seven Sacraments?

Review the groupings of sacraments and point out that they will be presented in that order: first initiation, then healing, and finally service. The symbols, ritual steps, and meanings of each sacrament can be found in the next lessons (C3–9).

Mention that each sacrament has a proper *matter* and *form* (material and action; a quick chart could be shared). While they cannot fully contain the mysteries they hold, they are the *necessary means* by which the effects become present (for example, without water, there

is no baptism). Conversely, the next lesson (C3: *The Sacrament of Baptism*) explains why Christian candidates are not "rebaptized"—it's impossible to undo or redo divine work.



- *Baptism* incorporates us into the Church and gives us a rebirth as daughters and sons of God.
- *Confirmation* is a continuation, ratification, or sealing of baptism. It helps us focus on the missionary dimensions of the baptismal commitment.
- *Eucharist* is the preeminent sacrament from which all others have meaning. In the Eucharist, Christ is most profoundly present in the Church, which gathers to hear the word of God and to share the nourishment of Christ's Body with one another.

#### Sacraments of Healing

These sacraments celebrate and reveal to us God's power to heal us in soul and body.

- *Penance and reconciliation* focuses on forgiveness in our lives and on our acceptance of that forgiveness, which brings us back to spiritual health in the family of God after we have turned away.
- *Anointing of the sick* takes place as representatives of the community gather in faith to pray over and lay hands on those who are sick. The Church, like Christ, desires the health of the whole human person.

#### Sacraments of Service

These sacraments celebrate the Christian vocation of service and consecrate us to minister within our own families and within the wider Church community.

- *Matrimony* (marriage) celebrates and witnesses the covenant of love between two people and symbolizes in that union Christ's covenant of love for the Church.
- *Holy orders* (ordination) is a sacrament of service by which some are called by God, through the Church, to be spiritual leaders.

You will learn more about each of the sacraments as you continue your study.

#### How Do the Sacraments "Work?"

The traditional explanation is that the sacraments *effect*, or bring about, what they symbolize. For example, the pouring of or immersion into water in the rite of baptism symbolizes the soul being cleansed of sin. At the same time, God is making that cleansing happen. The laying on of hands and anointing in the rite of confirmation *both symbolize and make happen* the sealing of the recipient with the gift of the Holy Spirit. This occurs "independently of the personal holiness of the minister....The fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them" (CCC 1128).

#### Sacraments Celebrate Christ's Life

The Church teaches that the seven sacraments were instituted by Christ. The sacraments come out of the story of Jesus' life and actions. For example, baptism calls to mind the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan and the way Jesus gathered a community around himself. It also reminds us of Jesus' command to carry the gospel to others and to baptize them. The Eucharist recalls the Last Supper. The Gospels also include accounts of other meals when Jesus invited those who were rejected by others to eat with him. Penance and reconciliation reminds us of Jesus' invitation to forgive one another, and of the way he forgave those who put him to death.

The sacraments also flow from Jesus' values and teachings. He raised basic values and experiences (forgiveness, concern for the sick, marriage, service) to new levels. He transformed ordinary human values into spiritual values by helping people see God's love made visible through them. As we celebrate the sacraments, we, like the first followers of Jesus, have the opportunity to encounter him in our acceptance of the values he lived and affirmed. In that encounter, Jesus is present to us as he was present to the early Church.

When Jesus instituted the sacraments and placed Peter at the head of the Church, he gave the apostles, and those who follow them in leading the Church, the mission and authority to minister and maintain the sacraments.

## How Do the Sacraments "Work?"

Distinguish between sacramental grace and superstition (CCC 2110–11, 2138).

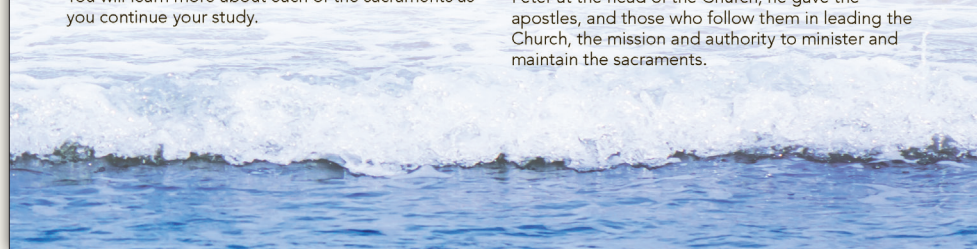
Offer simple, straightforward responses if participants express concerns surrounding sacramental doctrine and practice. Refer them to the pastor if complex or pastoral matters are raised.

## Sacraments Celebrate the Community's Life

Ask participants for examples of personal, social, or cultural rituals, such as birthday, wedding, and holiday traditions. Then ask, "What good do these acts and events maintain within your family or community?" Explain that the sacraments have the same function and purpose.

Ask the participants, "What attracts you to the Church's sacraments? What benefits do you see to having each of the seven sacraments?"

Invite candidates, sponsors, or leaders to share their experiences with the sacraments (for instance, baptism, Eucharist, marriage).





Share these responses to Jesus' signs of love as needed:

- Mark 14:3–9 "A woman came with an alabaster jar of perfumed oil, costly genuine spikenard. She broke the alabaster jar and poured it on his head....Jesus said, '...She has done a good thing for me.'" The woman, aware of Jesus' impending death, responded to his loving sacrifice by preparing his body for burial.
- Luke 7:36–39 "[The sinful woman] stood behind [Jesus] at his feet weeping and began to bathe his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the ointment." This woman responded to Christ's forgiveness and mercy with a (physical) sign of love.
- Luke 10:38–42 "She had a sister named Mary [who] sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak. Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him....The Lord said to her in reply, '...Mary has chosen the better part...'" Both sisters responded to Jesus' presence and friendship: Martha with hospitality, Mary with fellowship and devotion.
- Luke 5:27–32 "And leaving everything behind, he got up and followed him. Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house..." Levi (Matthew) responded to Christ's invitation with a total life change, discipleship, and celebration.

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### Sacraments Celebrate the Life of the Community


Each sacrament celebrates through ritual and symbols something happening in the lives of the celebrating community. For example, Eucharist strengthens the unity of Christians as they receive it. It celebrates God's nourishing presence with us now.

While the sacraments benefit us as individuals, they also bring life to the entire Church. As members of Christ's body, when we are strengthened as individuals, the family of God is strengthened as a whole (CCC 1134). Sacraments are more than just one-time liturgical celebrations. They serve as ongoing symbols of God's love made visible to and through us.

Looking for and responding to Jesus' signs of love will keep our connection to God alive and strong. Read about some of the ways people in the Bible responded to Jesus' signs of love. Discuss what you find with the rest of the group.


Mark 14:3–9      Luke 7:36–39  
Luke 10:38–42      Luke 5:27–32

• When you experience God's love, how do you respond?



Reflect on the question below in your prayer journal:

• How might the sacraments help keep my heart open to God's love?



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## Journaling

Encourage participants to reflect on the question throughout the week. Remind them to seek inspiration and ideas from Scripture, which is full of people who experienced and responded to God's love (see lesson activity).

## Closing Prayer

Request special intentions from the group, then pray the Glory Be (Doxology). This simple prayer proclaims God's faithful presence in our lives—yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

## Looking Ahead

The next lesson, *C3: The Sacrament of Baptism*, focuses on the first and fundamental sacrament, which begins our life in Christ. Have each participant talk with his or her sponsor or another parishioner about why the sacramental life of the Church is such a blessing.