

LIGUORI CHRISTIAN INITIATION PROGRAM

Journey of Faith



FOR CHILDREN

CATECHUMENATE LEADER GUIDE



Journey of Faith for Children, Catechumenate Leader Guide (827181)

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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, *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). 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 the Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity [*Ad Gentes*], 14, from the Second Vatican Council documents).
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 recommends that it last at least one year 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.

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 a call-and-response format.
3. *Lesson.* The RCIA director, pastor, or another trained 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 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 director of religious education (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.

C5: The Sacrament of the Eucharist

Catechism: 1322–1419

Objectives

- Recognize the scriptural context for Catholic teaching on the Eucharist.
- Relate and reflect on the Real Presence in the Eucharist.
- Identify the call to imitate Christ, especially through sacrifice.

Leader Meditation

John 6:25–51

As Catholics, our faith in the Real Presence of our Lord in the Eucharist sets us apart from many other Christian churches. Meditate on this passage from St. John's Gospel, which proclaims the central truth upon which all Catholic truths are based. Our faith must be like that of the apostles, who answered Jesus, saying, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

Leader Preparation

- Read the lesson, this lesson plan, the Scripture passage, and the *Catechism* sections. This may help you answer questions from children coming from faith traditions that view holy Communion as only symbolic.
- If possible, try to schedule a time of eucharistic adoration for your RCIA group.
- If you can, show the children unconsecrated bread and wine, plus a Communion chalice and a paten.
- Be familiar with the following vocabulary terms: Eucharist, substance. The definitions are in this guide's glossary.

Welcome

Greet participants as they arrive. Check for supplies and immediate needs. Solicit questions or comments about the previous session and/or share new information and findings. Begin promptly.

Opening Scripture

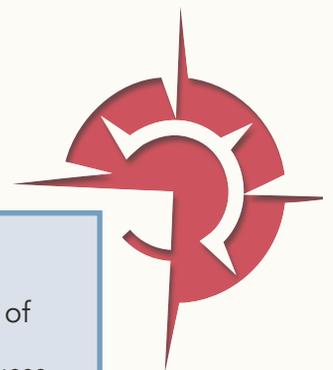
John 6:25–51

Light the candle and read aloud. Before you begin the lesson, ask the children what they think it means when Jesus says he is the "bread of life" or "bread come down from heaven."

The holy Eucharist completes Christian initiation. Those who have been raised to the dignity of the royal priesthood by Baptism and configured more deeply to Christ by confirmation participate with the whole community in the Lord's own sacrifice by means of the Eucharist.

CCC 1322

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The Sacrament of the Eucharist

"The Eucharist can be a complicated mystery to understand," Mrs. Evans said. "Some people believe that the bread and wine are just symbols. Or that the bread and wine don't remain the Body and Blood after Communion. As Catholics, we believe the bread and wine really become the Body and Blood of Jesus."

"But what does it taste like?" asked Tanya.

"Why didn't Jesus just make a different way of sharing himself?" wondered Terrence.

Mrs. Evans said, "Communion still tastes like bread and wine even though it's been transformed. Jesus had a reason for sharing himself in this way. We're going to read about it in Scripture."



CCC 1322-1419

The Sacrament of the Eucharist

Answer the reflection question at the top of the next page as a group by writing down questions on the board or in another place where you can keep track of them. You'll come back to these questions at the end of the lesson to see which ones you've answered and which ones you may need to check on and then answer at the next lesson.

The Last Supper of Jesus

Depending on the average age of the children in your group, you may want to read the actual Scripture passages cited in the lesson.

After you've read through the story of the Last Supper, ask the children what actions Jesus did or what symbols and words he used during the meal.

He preached to his apostles before the meal, he used bread and wine, he lifted the bread up and broke it, he called the bread his Body, he lifted up the cup (chalice), he said the wine was his Blood, he shared the meal with his friends, and so on.

Once you've gone through the story, ask children if these actions, words, or symbols remind them of anything. *(They should think of the Mass.)*

Then ask the children what happened after the Last Supper. *(Jesus sacrificed himself on the cross for our sins.)* Emphasize to the children the importance of Jesus really and truly offering himself up on the cross for our sins. Not only did Jesus give us his Body and Blood at the Last Supper, he also gave up his body and shed his blood for us on the cross.

Ask the children to think about ways they can live like Jesus by sacrificing for others. Then ask each child to share a way, compiling all replies into a list. *(Responses will vary, but some may include sacrificing time to do extra chores at home, giving up part of an allowance to donate to the collection at Mass on Sunday, and sacrificing play time to help a younger sibling or classmate with schoolwork.)*



What questions do you have about the Eucharist?

The Last Supper of Jesus (adapted from Matthew 26:26–29)

Jesus was at supper with his closest friends. He was sitting near Peter, James, and John. As everyone gathered at the table, Jesus talked about many things. Jesus told his friends about a love that never ends. "You are all my friends," he said.

Then he broke and shared the bread. "This is my body," Jesus said. "It will be given up so all of you may live." Then he filled a cup and said, "This is the blood I shed. My own life will be the best gift I can give."

This made his friends sad, but he told them to be happy. God had planned it this way. "I will come again, and then you all will know that the Son of God is in the world to stay."

We call this biblical event in history the Last Supper because it's the last meal Jesus shared before his crucifixion. Through the power of God and the working of the Holy Spirit we celebrate the Last Supper of Jesus at every Mass.

We call it the **Eucharist**, and it's a holy meal you get to share with Jesus and the whole Church.



Sharing a Special Meal

Sharing a meal together is a way to get to know people better and show we care. Families talk about their days over dinner. When we have friends come in from out of town we invite them over to share a meal. We celebrate holidays by getting together with relatives for a special meal.

List three times you and your family or friends share a meal. Then in one or two sentences explain why that meal is special.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

The Real Presence of Jesus

In the sacrament of the Eucharist, you will receive the Body and Blood of Jesus—just like his disciples at the Last Supper. We know Jesus is really present in the form of bread and wine because Jesus told his disciples, "This is my body." He didn't say, "This is a symbol of my body" or, "This is both my body and blood and bread and wine." The bread and wine truly become the Body and Blood of Jesus.

Sharing a Special Meal

Give the children time to respond to the reflection question. They may need to continue their answers on a separate sheet of paper. Then ask them to find a partner and share one of their responses.

The Real Presence of Jesus

Emphasize that the Eucharist really does become the Body and Blood of Jesus even though its appearance remains the same. Remind the children that the sacraments are physical signs of invisible realities, just like the appearance of bread and wine is a physical sign of God's invisible presence.

When the priest calls on the Holy Spirit at Mass, God makes Jesus as present as the person sitting next to us in the pew. What we see and touch points us to a reality that remains invisible. When we eat his Body and drink his Blood, Jesus enters our hearts to help us live in his love.

The Eucharist still looks and tastes like bread and wine even though it's been transformed. That's because it's **substance**, what something really is, changes even though its appearance doesn't. We can't explain how this happens, but we believe because Jesus told us it's true. It's a mystery of faith. Only God holds the answer.

The Unbelievable Promise

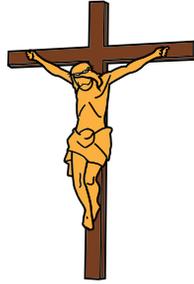
Jesus made a special promise about the Eucharist. One day, when he was teaching a large crowd, he said, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever... and I will raise him on the last day" (John 6:51, 54).

Many people didn't understand what Jesus was saying. "This is too hard to believe," they said, and walked away. But the disciples stayed because they believed the promise Jesus made about eternal life. They wanted to be with him forever.

Jesus makes this promise to you, too. If you eat this bread, Jesus' Body, you will live forever with God in heaven.

A Super Kind of Love

After the Last Supper, Jesus did exactly what he promised—he suffered and died on the cross for us. It must have been hard for his Mother and friends to watch his suffering. But imagine their joy when Jesus came back from the dead on Easter! That day they knew the power of Jesus' love. They knew his promise of eternal life would come true.



When we receive the Eucharist at Mass, we remember that Jesus gave his life for us. We remember that his sacrifice gives us eternal life and saves us from death. We remember and thank God for Jesus. Eucharist even means thanksgiving!

Thank you, Jesus!



A Super Kind of Love

As you discuss the Eucharist as Thanksgiving, go around the room and ask each child to share one thing she or he wants to thank Jesus for today. After each statement, the rest of the group responds, "Thank you, Jesus."

Final Activity

Give the children time at the end of the session to complete the final activity. Walk around as the children work and affirm correct answers and offer clarity on any points of confusion. The children's answers may vary. Sample responses follow for your reference.

List three things you learned about the Eucharist today.

1. It's really Jesus' Body and Blood.
2. It still tastes like bread and wine.
3. It's a meal we share with the Church.

List three promises Jesus made about the Eucharist.

1. The Eucharist is really Jesus' Body and Blood.
2. If we eat Jesus' Body and drink his Blood, we will have eternal life.
3. Jesus died for us, and he will come again.



WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

List three things you learned about the Eucharist today.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

List three promises Jesus made about the Eucharist.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

In Short



- The Bible describes the first Eucharist in the Last Supper.
- The Real Presence of Jesus is in the Eucharist.
- We listen for the call to imitate Christ.

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Closing Prayer

Close this lesson with the prayer below. Ask the children to repeat each line after you.

*Lord, help us
to take you at your word,
to trust when we feel confused
and to accept in the faith
that we, too, may come to know
the treasure you have given us
in your own Body and Blood,
broken and poured out for our sins.
You have become for us the food
of everlasting life.
Amen.*

Take-Home

Encourage the children and their parents (or godparents or sponsors) to attend eucharistic adoration together the next time your parish offers it.