

What About the Eastern Non-Catholic Candidates?

What is an Eastern Catholic?

A Christian is a member, canonically, not of a rite but of a specific Church which follows in its worship a certain pattern of liturgy called a "rite." Thus in Catholicism there is a Latin Catholic Church, and Eastern Catholic Churches. **They are all Catholic**, but they follow different liturgical rites.

There are six families of liturgical rites in the Catholic Church. They are: Latin, Byzantine, Alexandrian, Antiochene, Chaldean, and Armenian.

At least twenty ritual Churches comprise the Catholic Church: Armenian, Bulgarian, Byelorussian, Chaldean, Coptic, Ethiopian, Greek-Melkite, Hellenic Byzantine Rite, Hungarian Greek Catholic, Italo-Greek and Albanian, Krizevsky (Yugoslavian, Croatian, Russine, Macedonian, Ukrainian), Latin, Malabar, Malankar, Maronite, Romanian, Russian, Ruthenian, Byzantine-Catholic USA, Slovak Greek Catholic, Syrian, and Ukrainian. Each of these Churches uses one of the rites that exist in the six families listed above.

Members of any of the Eastern Catholic Churches listed above who wish to become members of the Latin Church are not candidates for reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church, since they already belong to the Catholic Church. There are rules which govern the circumstances of their transfer of membership, however, which must be followed.

What is an Eastern Non-Catholic?

There are several groups of non-Catholic Eastern Churches. There are those Churches, which call themselves **Orthodox** (usually Byzantine Churches). There are other Churches, sometimes known as **non-Chalcedonian** Churches, which may or may not use the term Orthodox (such as the Coptic Church, the Syrian Jacobite Church, the Ethiopian Church and the Armenian Church). There is also the Church of the East, or **Assyrian Church** (which is Nestorian). None of these Churches is in union with Rome; they are non-Catholic Churches.

For information on the reception of candidates from Eastern non-Catholic Churches, see below: Rules Concerning Eastern Non-Catholics Becoming Catholic.

Rules Concerning Eastern Non-Catholics Becoming Catholic

Non-Catholic Christians, when they are received into the full communion of the Catholic Church, must become members of the ritual Church indicated by their Baptism. **Thus, all Protestants must become members of the Latin Church.** Someone who is Greek Orthodox must become a member of the Greek Catholic Church. A Syrian Orthodox person must become a member of the Syrian Catholic Church, etc. **Exceptions constitute a transfer of rite, and require the permission of the Holy See. If such permission is necessary, it should be sought before any participation in the formation process of the catechumenate.**

In the case of uncatechized Eastern non-Catholic candidates, if and when permission to join the Latin rite is granted, these candidates may participate in the formation process of the catechumenate, but not in its rites. Such candidates are received with a simple profession of faith, and no liturgical rite (RCIA no. 474). The simple profession of faith takes place before a priest, and the date should be recorded in the parish records as the date of their reception. For pastoral reasons, these candidates should be warmly welcomed by the parish community, and catechized in an appropriate way before their profession of faith. The Baptism and Confirmation of eastern non-Catholic Christians are considered valid by the Catholic Church and must not be repeated.

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Notes Concerning Eastern Catholics Who Wish to Join the Latin Rite

These individuals are never a part of the catechumenate. They are already Catholic. Catholics, one and all, everywhere in the world should retain their own rite, cherish it and observe it. In special cases however, individuals, communities, and even regions have the right of recourse to the Holy See, which is the supreme arbiter of inter-ecclesial relations. The Holy See will itself or through other authorities provide for special needs in an ecumenical spirit by issuing timely norms, decrees, or rescripts (*Orientalium ecclesiarum* no. 4).

A transfer of rite normally requires permission of the Holy See, and should not be encouraged. Such a transfer is not to be treated under any circumstances as part of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. Information about this topic is included in these statutes for the orientation of the Catechumenate Director, who may be in the position of answering inquiries about this. Further information can be obtained by calling the chancery.

A child of parents who belong to the Latin Church becomes a member of the Latin Church by receiving Baptism in the Latin Church. If one of the parents does not belong to the Latin Church, and both parents agree that the child will be baptized in the Latin Church, the child may be baptized in the Latin Church and will belong to it because of being baptized in it. If the parents do not agree, the child is to be baptized in the ritual Church to which the father belongs (canon 111).

A similar provision is used in the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, (canon 29): "By virtue of baptism, a child who has not yet completed his fourteenth year of age is enrolled in the Church sui iuris of the Catholic father; or the Church sui iuris of the mother if only the mother is Catholic or if both parents by agreement freely request it, with due regard for particular law established by the Apostolic See." Anyone to be baptized who has completed the fourteenth year of age can freely choose to be baptized in any of the ritual Churches and in this case the person belongs to that Church which is chosen (canon 111).

After receiving Baptism, the following are enrolled in another ritual Church (canon 112):

- A. One who has obtained permission from the Holy See. (Anyone who does not fall into categories B or C below should contact the chancery to seek permission from the Holy See.)
- B. A spouse who declares at the time of marriage or during marriage that he or she is transferring to the ritual Church of the other spouse. When the marriage has ended, however, that person can freely return to the Church of their Baptism.
- C. Children under the age of fourteen, of parents who have legitimately transferred to another ritual Church. But when they reach the age of fourteen, they may return to the Church of their Baptism. (From John Huels, *The Pastoral Companion to Canon Law* p. 28-29)