

What is the Period of the Catechumenate About?

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The catechumenate period is the lengthiest period of the whole initiation process. "The length of the catechumenate period will depend on the grace of God and on various circumstances . . . Nothing, therefore, can be settled a priori [that is, beforehand]. The time spent in the catechumenate should be long enough—several years if necessary—for the conversion and faith of the catechumens to become strong." (RCIA no. 76). In the dioceses of the United States the catechumenate period is to be at least one full liturgical year.

The USCCB National Statutes state that this period should extend from Easter to Easter (see National Statutes no. 6). Preferably it should begin before Lent in one year and extend until Easter of the following year.

Pastoral Formation During the Period of the Catechumenate

The four ways in which the catechumenate period brings to maturity the initial faith that is manifested in the Rite of Acceptance and Welcome are:

- (1) suitable catechesis
- (2) liturgical rites,
- (3) community life,
- (4) apostolic works

(RCIA no. 75).

Experience has shown that the Word of God proclaimed in the Sunday assembly is the most effective basis for weekly catechesis in the catechumenate. The lectionary readings not only contain material for instruction, but they also foster prayer and formation in the common liturgical life of the faithful.

Participation in the liturgy of the Word at Sunday Mass is an integral part of the catechumenate. After the Liturgy of the Word at Sunday Mass, the catechumens are kindly dismissed, together with a catechist, to reflect on the Word they have just heard. Candidates may be dismissed with them, if this is felt to be pastorally helpful. After the dismissal catechesis, a longer catechetical session may follow, in which particular issues are explored in depth and the Church's tradition may be presented more fully. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and other resources can be helpful to catechists in preparing for these sessions.

With the help of the sponsor, the catechumen or candidate should be introduced to other members of the parish community, and take part in parish activities to the extent that they are able. The development of the catechumens' and candidates' active participation in the mission of the Church should not be deferred until after their sacramental initiation, but should begin during the catechumenate period, under the guidance of the sponsor. Catechumens and candidates should be encouraged to share their newfound faith with others.