

BECOMING CATHOLIC

RCIA - A Catechumenate Companion

For unbaptised adults preparing for Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist

My name: _____

Sponsor / godparent: _____

Date of Acceptance: _____

Date of Election: _____

Date of Initiation: _____

St Mary's | St John Bosco | St Edward's Parish

Catechumenate parish edition | 2026

This is a journey, not a short course

This book is for an adult who has not been baptised and is exploring or preparing to become Catholic. In the Diocese of Nottingham this formal process is called RCIA: the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. If you have already been validly baptised, stop here and tell the priest: you need the pathway for Reception into Full Communion, not the catechumenate for the unbaptised.

RCIA is a gradual journey of faith and conversion within the Church. It includes teaching, prayer, Sunday worship, Christian living, service, the support of a sponsor and parish community, and liturgical rites which mark real stages of growth. Finishing a set number of pages does not determine readiness for Baptism.

THE BOOK SUPPLIES THE LESSON; THE PARISH SUPPLIES THE JOURNEY

These conversations make the catechesis simple and zero-prep. They do not replace the periods and rites of RCIA, personal conversion, participation in parish life, or the priest and bishop's pastoral discernment.

How to use this book

The book contains twenty-four short conversations. Most can be used in about 20-30 minutes after Sunday Mass or at another convenient parish time. Where the parish celebrates the dismissal of catechumens after the Liturgy of the Word, reflection on the Sunday Scriptures may also take place then. Repeat, divide or expand a conversation whenever needed.

Each conversation follows the same rhythm: one central truth, short teaching, one Talk About It question, five essential answers, a prayer and one practical step. Answer in your own words before reading the concise answer. Bring the question you actually have. No one should make a profession of faith they do not sincerely mean.

Before Baptism you do not receive sacramental Confession, because Baptism itself forgives all sin. You should nevertheless learn repentance, make a sincere examination of your life, and turn from sin. After Baptism, the Sacrament of Penance becomes part of ordinary Catholic life. You also do not receive Holy Communion before initiation.

SIMPLE RULE Come to Sunday Mass. Open the next conversation. Talk honestly. Pray. Live one concrete step. Let the rites and the Christian year shape the journey. Readiness matters more than a calendar.

Four periods and three major steps

Period	Name	What this period is for	Major step
1. Evangelisation and Precatechumenate	INQUIRER	No fixed duration. The Gospel is proclaimed; questions are welcomed; the beginnings of faith and conversion are discerned.	First Step: Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens
2. Catechumenate	CATECHUMEN	A substantial period of catechesis, prayer, liturgy, Christian living, charity, community and mission. It may last as long as genuine growth requires.	Second Step: Election or Enrolment of Names
3. Purification and Enlightenment	ELECT	Normally Lent. A more intense spiritual preparation centred on conversion, the Scrutinies, presentations and prayer.	Third Step: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist
4. Mystagogy	NEOPHYTE	Normally the Easter season and beyond. The newly baptised deepen their experience of the sacraments and enter more fully into Catholic life and mission.	Ongoing discipleship

IMPORTANT The only normal calendar anchor is the Paschal pattern: Election is ordinarily on the First Sunday of Lent, initiation is normally at the Easter Vigil, and mystagogy follows in the Easter season. The earlier periods are not meant to be forced into a fixed number of weeks.

What changes at each stage?

Before Acceptance, you are an inquirer. At Acceptance, the Church publicly receives your intention and you become a catechumen, joined to the Church in a special way. At Election, the Church discerns that you are ready for the final Lenten preparation and you are called one of the elect. At the Easter Vigil, you are baptised, confirmed and receive the Eucharist; you are then a neophyte, a newly baptised Catholic.

The parish priest follows the approved RCIA, diocesan directions and the bishop's arrangements. Adults aged fourteen or over have a particular relationship to the diocesan bishop in the law and rite of initiation, so local diocesan practice must be followed.

Twenty-four conversations

	Conversation	Purpose
1	The Desire for God	Why the human heart seeks meaning, truth, goodness and God.
2	Jesus Christ and the Good News	Who Jesus is and what he came to do.
3	Faith, Conversion and Discipleship	What it means to believe, repent and follow Christ.
4	Why the Church? Why Baptism?	Christ, his Church and the call to new birth.
5	Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium	How divine revelation is handed on and interpreted.
6	One God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit	The Trinity and the heart of the Creed.
7	Creation, Human Dignity and the Fall	Creation, image of God, freedom, original sin and hope.
8	The Word Became Flesh	Jesus Christ, true God and true man.
9	The Paschal Mystery	The Cross, Resurrection, Ascension and salvation.
10	The Holy Spirit, Grace and Justification	Grace, faith, conversion and the new life God gives.
11	The Church Christ Founded	One, holy, catholic and apostolic; Pope and bishops.
12	Mary, the Saints and the Last Things	Communion of saints, death, judgement, heaven and purgatory.
13	Liturgy and the Seven Sacraments	Christ acts in the Church's sacramental worship.
14	Baptism: Dying and Rising with Christ	What Baptism does and why it cannot be repeated.
15	Confirmation and the Gift of the Holy Spirit	Seal, strengthening and mission.
16	The Eucharist and the Holy Mass	Real Presence, sacrifice, Communion and Sunday worship.
17	The Sacraments of Healing and Vocation	Penance, Anointing, Holy Orders and Matrimony.
18	Freedom, Conscience, Virtue and Sin	The moral life, commandments, Beatitudes and conversion.
19	Love in Concrete Life	Human life, sexuality, marriage, truth, justice and charity.
20	Prayer and the Ordinary Catholic Life	Daily prayer, Sunday Mass, Scripture, devotions and mission.
21	Election, Scrutinies and the Battle for the Heart	The final Lenten purification and deeper conversion.
22	Creed, Lord's Prayer and Final Preparation	The faith and prayer of the Church before initiation.
23	The Easter Vigil and the Sacraments of Initiation	Baptism, Confirmation and first Holy Communion.
24	Mystagogy: Living as a Newly Baptised Catholic	Eucharistic life, Confession, parish belonging and mission.

Appendices

- A. First Pastoral Check - the route before the route
- B. The Major Rites - Acceptance, Election, Scrutinies and the Easter Vigil
- C. Sponsor and Godparent
- D. Things to Know Clearly - forty concise answers
- E. Readiness Discernment - Acceptance, Election and Initiation
- F. A Simple Rule of Christian Life
- G. Special Cases and Danger of Death H. Sources and Parish Authority

The Desire for God

REMEMBER God created you for truth, goodness, love and ultimately for himself. The restlessness of the human heart can become an invitation to seek the living God.

Human beings ask questions no possession, success or distraction can finally answer: Why am I here? What is good? What is love? What happens when I die? Why do I long for a happiness that does not pass away?

The Catholic faith begins not with the idea that human longing is foolish, but that God has already taken the initiative. Creation itself points beyond itself, conscience calls us towards the good, and grace can stir a person to seek God even before that person has words for what is happening.

Faith does not mean switching off reason. The Church welcomes honest questions and believes truth cannot finally contradict truth. The first step is therefore not pretending certainty; it is becoming willing to seek God sincerely and to follow where truth leads.

TALK ABOUT IT What are the deepest questions or desires that have brought you to explore the Catholic faith now?

THE ESSENTIALS

- 1. Did God create me?** Yes. You are created by God, loved by him and called to communion with him.
- 2. Can human reason know anything about God?** Yes. From creation and the human person, reason can know that God exists, though revelation brings us into a deeper knowledge of him.
- 3. Is faith opposed to reason?** No. Faith and reason both come from God and rightly understood assist one another.
- 4. Why do human beings remain restless?** Created goods are real gifts, but they cannot fully satisfy a heart made for God.
- 5. What should an inquirer do first?** Seek honestly, pray simply, listen to the Gospel, attend Mass and ask real questions.

PRAYER God, if I do not yet know how to speak to you, receive my desire for truth. Lead me out of confusion and towards the light you want to give. Amen.

THIS WEEK Begin a simple daily prayer: "God, show me the truth and give me courage to follow it." Attend Sunday Mass and notice one thing that awakens a question or desire.

Jesus Christ and the Good News

REMEMBER Christianity begins with Jesus Christ: the eternal Son of God who became man, proclaimed the Kingdom, died for our sins, rose bodily from the dead and calls us to follow him.

The Gospel is not first a moral system or a religious technique. It is good news about what God has done in Jesus Christ. God has entered human history, taken our nature, shared our suffering and opened the way from sin and death to eternal life.

Jesus teaches with divine authority, forgives sins, heals, gathers disciples and reveals the Father. His Cross is not an accidental defeat: he freely gives himself for us. His Resurrection is not merely a symbol that his ideas lived on; the crucified Jesus is truly raised and becomes the source of new life.

To become Christian is to become his disciple. That means trusting him, learning his teaching, receiving his grace and allowing every part of life to be brought under his lordship.

TALK ABOUT IT Who do you presently understand Jesus to be, and what would change if he truly is Lord and risen from the dead?

THE ESSENTIALS

- 1. Who is Jesus Christ?** The eternal Son of God who became truly man without ceasing to be truly God.
- 2. Why did he become man?** For our salvation: to reveal the Father, free us from sin and make us sharers in divine life.
- 3. What did the Cross accomplish?** Christ freely offered himself for our sins and reconciled humanity to the Father.
- 4. Did Jesus truly rise?** Yes. His Resurrection is a real event and the foundation of Christian faith and hope.
- 5. What does Jesus ask of us?** Faith, conversion, love, obedience and lifelong discipleship.

PRAYER Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, reveal yourself to me. Give me faith to know you, love you and follow you wherever you lead. Amen.

THIS WEEK Read one Gospel chapter slowly each day this week, beginning with Mark 1. Ask: What does this show me about Jesus?

Faith, Conversion and Discipleship

REMEMBER Faith is a free response to God who reveals himself. Conversion turns the whole person towards God, and discipleship means learning to live with Jesus as Lord.

Christian faith includes believing truths God has revealed, but it is more than agreeing with statements. It is personal trust in God and the decision to entrust oneself to him. Because God gives grace first, even our response is supported by his help.

Conversion means turning away from sin and towards God. It is both a decisive beginning and a lifelong pattern. You do not need to be morally perfect before becoming a catechumen, but there should be a real desire to leave what is incompatible with following Christ.

Discipleship becomes visible in prayer, worship, honesty, chastity, mercy, forgiveness, justice and love. The Church does not ask you to manufacture a polished testimony; she looks for a real beginning of faith and conversion that can grow.

TALK ABOUT IT Is there any area of life where following Christ already seems to be asking you to change direction?

THE ESSENTIALS

- 1. What is faith?** A grace-enabled response by which we believe God and entrust ourselves to him.
- 2. What is conversion?** Turning from sin and falsehood towards God in faith, repentance and a changed life.
- 3. Must faith be free?** Yes. No one may be forced to embrace the Christian faith.
- 4. Does becoming Christian require perfection first?** No. It requires a real beginning of faith, repentance and willingness to grow.
- 5. What is discipleship?** Learning from Jesus and allowing his truth and grace to shape the whole of life.

PRAYER Father, give me the grace of sincere conversion. Show me what I must leave behind and what I must begin, and keep me close to your Son. Amen.

THIS WEEK Choose one concrete act of conversion: repair an injustice, end a dishonest practice, forgive, begin daily prayer, or seek help for a pattern that keeps you from living truthfully.

Why the Church? Why Baptism?

REMEMBER Jesus does not call isolated believers only. He gathers a people, the Church, and commands his disciples to make disciples of all nations by Baptism and teaching.

Christ founded the Church as a visible communion of faith, sacraments and apostolic ministry. The Church is not holy because every member behaves perfectly; she is holy because Christ is her head, the Holy Spirit dwells in her and she is entrusted with the means of grace.

Baptism is not a membership ceremony added after faith. It is the sacrament of new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, the gateway to the other sacraments and incorporation into Christ and his Church. The Church has baptised from apostolic times in obedience to Christ.

The Rite of Acceptance is not Baptism. It marks a public beginning: after a sufficient first evangelisation and initial conversion, the Church accepts an inquirer as a catechumen and undertakes to accompany that person more deeply towards initiation.

TALK ABOUT IT What attracts you to belonging to the Church, and what about belonging to a visible Church is difficult for you?

THE ESSENTIALS

- 1. Did Jesus intend a Church?** Yes. He gathered disciples, chose apostles and entrusted them with teaching, sanctifying and shepherding his people.
- 2. What is Baptism?** The sacrament of new birth by water and the word, which frees from sin and incorporates us into Christ and the Church.
- 3. Can an unbaptised person receive the other sacraments first?** No. Baptism is the gateway to sacramental life.
- 4. What is the Rite of Acceptance?** The liturgical step by which an inquirer with the beginnings of faith and conversion is accepted into the Order of Catechumens.
- 5. Does Acceptance guarantee Baptism at the next Easter?** No. The catechumenate continues as long as genuine growth and readiness require.

PRAYER Jesus, you gather your people into one flock. If you are calling me into your Church, give me humility, perseverance and joy as I take the next step. Amen.

THIS WEEK Talk with the priest or mentor about whether you are ready for the Rite of Acceptance. Name one hope and one hesitation honestly.

Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium

REMEMBER God's one revelation is handed on in Sacred Scripture and Apostolic Tradition. The Magisterium serves that revelation by authentically interpreting the apostolic faith.

The Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit and truly teaches what God wills to reveal for our salvation. Catholics therefore read Scripture constantly in the liturgy, catechesis, prayer and theology.

Apostolic Tradition is not a collection of later human customs placed above the Bible. It is the living transmission of the faith Christ entrusted to the apostles. Scripture itself was written, received and recognised within this apostolic life of the Church.

The Pope and bishops in communion with him exercise the Church's Magisterium. They do not invent a new revelation. Their task is to guard, explain and authentically interpret the deposit of faith so that the Church can remain one in the truth received from Christ.

TALK ABOUT IT When sincere Christians interpret the same biblical text differently, what kind of authority would be needed to preserve unity in truth?

THE ESSENTIALS

- 1. Is the Bible inspired?** Yes. God is its principal author, working through human authors.
- 2. What is Apostolic Tradition?** The living transmission of the apostolic faith in the Church.
- 3. Are Scripture and Tradition competing sources?** No. They are inseparably related ways in which the one revelation is handed on.
- 4. What is the Magisterium?** The teaching office of the Pope and bishops in communion with him.
- 5. Is the Magisterium above God's Word?** No. It serves the Word by faithfully guarding and interpreting it.

PRAYER Holy Spirit, who inspired the Scriptures and guides the Church, make me docile to your Word and protect me from pride, fear and confusion. Amen.

THIS WEEK Read Acts 2:42, 2 Thessalonians 2:15 and 1 Timothy 3:15. Bring one question about Scripture, Tradition or authority to the next conversation.

One God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit

REMEMBER There is one God in three divine Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is not three gods but the one divine nature eternally possessed by three distinct Persons.

God is not one being among many. He is the creator and source of all that exists, eternal, all-holy, all-knowing, just and merciful. Yet the deepest mystery of his life is revealed by Christ: the one God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God; yet there are not three Gods. The Persons are really distinct by their relations to one another, while each is wholly the one divine God.

Christian prayer is therefore Trinitarian. We are brought to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. The Sign of the Cross is a compact profession of the faith into which you are preparing to be baptised.

TALK ABOUT IT What difference does it make to think of God not as lonely power but as eternal communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

THE ESSENTIALS

1. **How many gods are there?** One God.
2. **How many divine Persons are there?** Three: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
3. **Is each Person fully God?** Yes. Each Person is wholly and eternally the one God.
4. **Are the Persons simply three names for one Person?** No. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are really distinct Persons.
5. **Into whose name are Christians baptised?** The one name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

PRAYER Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

THIS WEEK Make the Sign of the Cross slowly morning and evening. Learn the Apostles' Creed if you do not already know it.

Creation, Human Dignity and the Fall

REMEMBER God freely created all things good. Human beings are made in his image for communion with him, but the human family is wounded by original sin and needs redemption.

Creation is not divine and God is not part of the universe. Everything that exists depends upon him. Human beings possess a unique dignity because they are made in the image of God, capable of reason, freedom, love and communion with him. Human freedom is a gift, but from the beginning humanity misused freedom. Original sin is not a personal act committed by each newborn child. It is the fallen condition into which humanity is born: deprived of original holiness and wounded in nature.

The effects of the fall include suffering, death, disordered desires and a tendency towards sin, but human nature is not destroyed. God immediately begins the work of salvation, fulfilled in Christ, the new Adam.

TALK ABOUT IT Where do you see both the goodness of human nature and the reality that something in human life is deeply wounded?

THE ESSENTIALS

- 1. Who created the world?** God freely created all things from nothing and sustains them in being.
- 2. What gives every human person dignity?** Every person is made in the image and likeness of God.
- 3. What is original sin?** The fallen condition inherited by humanity, involving loss of original holiness and a wounded human nature.
- 4. Is original sin a baby's personal wrongdoing?** No.
- 5. Did God abandon humanity after the fall?** No. He promised salvation and prepared humanity for Christ.

PRAYER Creator and Father, teach me to receive creation with gratitude, to respect every human person and to recognise my need for the salvation you give in Christ. Amen.

THIS WEEK Read Genesis 1:26-31 and Romans 5:12-21. Notice how Scripture holds together human dignity, sin and hope.

The Word Became Flesh

REMEMBER Jesus Christ is one divine Person, the eternal Son, with two complete natures, divine and human. He became truly man for our salvation without ceasing to be truly God.

At the Annunciation the eternal Son took human nature from the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the Incarnation. Jesus is not half God and half man, nor a human person later adopted by God.

Because he is truly human, Jesus has a human body, mind, will and emotions; he can suffer and die. Because he is truly divine, the one who acts and suffers in his humanity is the eternal Son of God. This is why his saving work has unique and universal power.

Mary is rightly called Mother of God because the child she bore is a divine Person. Catholic devotion to Mary protects the truth about Christ: everything the Church honours in her comes from God's grace and leads back to her Son.

TALK ABOUT IT Why does Christian salvation require Jesus to be truly God and truly human, rather than only a great teacher or prophet?

THE ESSENTIALS

- 1. Who is Jesus Christ?** The eternal Son of God made man.
- 2. How many Persons are in Christ?** One divine Person, the Son.
- 3. How many natures does Christ have?** Two: fully divine and fully human.
- 4. Did the Incarnation mean the Son stopped being God?** No. He assumed human nature without ceasing to be divine.
- 5. Why is Mary called Mother of God?** Because the one she conceived and bore according to his humanity is truly the eternal Son of God.

PRAYER Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, draw me close to the mystery of your Incarnation and teach me to receive your Mother with the reverence your grace has given her. Amen.

THIS WEEK Read Luke 1:26-38 and John 1:1-18. Write one sentence about what each passage teaches concerning Jesus.

The Paschal Mystery

REMEMBER By his Passion, death, Resurrection and Ascension, Jesus Christ conquers sin and death, reconciles us to the Father and opens the way to eternal life.

Sin creates a rupture humanity cannot heal by its own power. The Son freely offers himself in loving obedience to the Father and solidarity with sinners. His Cross is sacrifice, atonement, victory and the supreme revelation of divine love.

Jesus truly died and was buried. On the third day he truly rose in his glorified body. The Resurrection vindicates his identity, confirms his teaching and is the beginning of the new creation. Christian hope is therefore more than surviving in memory: it is bodily resurrection and life with God.

The Ascension does not mean Jesus abandons us. The risen Lord enters heavenly glory, intercedes for us, sends the Holy Spirit and remains present in his Church, especially in the sacraments.

TALK ABOUT IT Which part of the Paschal Mystery - Cross, Resurrection or Ascension - is hardest for you to understand or receive, and why?

THE ESSENTIALS

- 1. Why did Christ die?** He freely offered himself for our sins, reconciling us to the Father and defeating the powers of sin and death.
- 2. Did Jesus really die?** Yes.
- 3. Did he truly rise bodily?** Yes. The same Jesus who was crucified rose in a glorified body.
- 4. What does the Resurrection give us?** The foundation of faith, forgiveness, new life and hope of our own resurrection.
- 5. What is the Ascension?** Christ's entry in his humanity into heavenly glory, from where he reigns and intercedes for us.

PRAYER Jesus crucified and risen, have mercy on me. Unite my life to your Cross, raise me from sin and lead me towards the life that cannot die. Amen.

THIS WEEK Pray before a crucifix this week. Read Romans 6:3-11 and notice how St Paul connects Baptism directly with Christ's death and Resurrection.

The Holy Spirit, Grace and Justification

REMEMBER The Holy Spirit is the third divine Person. By grace God heals, sanctifies and adopts us, making us capable of faith, hope, charity and a life that truly pleases him.

Grace is not simply God overlooking sin from a distance. Sanctifying grace is a real participation in divine life, freely given through Christ. God acts first, awakens faith and enables our free response.

Justification includes forgiveness of sins and interior renewal. We cannot earn the initial gift of grace. Yet grace does not abolish freedom: God enables us to cooperate, grow in holiness and perform good works that are themselves fruits of his grace.

The Holy Spirit dwells in the baptised, gives theological virtues and gifts, forms the fruits of holiness and equips Christians with charisms for service. Christian life is therefore neither self-salvation nor passivity, but grace-enabled communion and cooperation.

TALK ABOUT IT When you hear the word "grace", do you imagine only pardon, or also God actually changing and sharing his life with a person?

THE ESSENTIALS

- 1. Who is the Holy Spirit?** The third Person of the Holy Trinity, true God with the Father and the Son.
- 2. What is sanctifying grace?** A stable gift by which we share in God's own life and are made holy and pleasing to him.
- 3. Can we earn the first grace of conversion?** No. God's grace precedes and enables our response.
- 4. Does justification only declare us forgiven?** It includes forgiveness and real interior renewal by grace.
- 5. Do good works matter?** Yes. Works done in grace are a genuine response of love and obedience, themselves made possible by God's grace.

PRAYER Holy Spirit, Lord and giver of life, prepare my heart for Baptism. Create in me faith, hope and charity, and teach me to cooperate freely with your grace. Amen.

THIS WEEK At the end of each day, thank God for one grace you noticed and ask for help in one area where you need to change.

The Church Christ Founded

REMEMBER The Church is the People of God, Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit. Christ founded one Church that is one, holy, catholic and apostolic and subsists in the Catholic Church.

The Church is both spiritual and visible. She is not merely the invisible collection of sincere believers, nor merely an institution. Christ joins his people through the profession of faith, sacramental life and apostolic governance.

The apostles received a real mission from Christ. The bishops succeed them in their pastoral office, and the Bishop of Rome, successor of St Peter, serves the unity of the whole Church. Papal authority is not a claim that every papal opinion is inspired; infallibility has precise conditions and serves the preservation of revealed truth.

The Church is holy despite the sins of her members. Those sins are real and sometimes grave; they call for repentance, justice and reform. Yet Christ does not abandon his Bride or withdraw the gifts of truth and grace entrusted to her.

TALK ABOUT IT What is easier for you to believe about the Church - her spiritual mystery or her visible authority - and which is harder?

THE ESSENTIALS

- 1. What is the Church?** The people gathered by the Father, united to Christ as his Body and made a temple of the Holy Spirit.
- 2. What are the four marks of the Church?** One, holy, catholic and apostolic.
- 3. Who are bishops?** Successors of the apostles who teach, sanctify and shepherd the Church in communion with one another and the Pope.
- 4. What is the role of the Pope?** As Bishop of Rome and successor of St Peter, he has a unique ministry of unity and universal pastoral authority.
- 5. Does the sin of Catholics make the Church cease to be holy?** No. Her holiness comes from Christ and his gifts, while her members always need conversion and reform.

PRAYER Lord Jesus, you loved the Church and gave yourself for her. Heal what is sinful, strengthen what is weak, and teach me to love your Church in truth rather than illusion. Amen.

THIS WEEK Learn the names of the Pope, your diocesan bishop and your parish priest. Pray for each of them once this week.

Mary, the Saints and the Last Things

REMEMBER All who belong to Christ form one communion. Catholics worship God alone, honour Mary and the saints as God's friends, ask their intercession, pray for the dead and hope for resurrection and eternal life.

Mary is honoured because of Christ. By a unique grace she was preserved from original sin from the first moment of her conception; she freely consented to become Mother of God, remained faithful to Christ and was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.

Asking a saint to pray for us does not replace Christ's unique mediation. Christians on earth ask one another for prayer; death does not destroy the communion of those who are alive in Christ. Images and relics are honoured relatively, not adored as gods.

At death each person comes before God. Heaven is perfect communion with the Trinity. Hell is the definitive self-exclusion from communion with God. Purgatory is the final purification of those who die in God's grace but still need purification. Christians await the resurrection of the body and the final judgement.

TALK ABOUT IT Which Catholic teaching here - Mary, saints, prayer for the dead, purgatory or the last judgement - raises the strongest question for you?

THE ESSENTIALS

- 1. Do Catholics worship Mary or the saints?** No. Adoration belongs to God alone.
- 2. Why ask saints to pray for us?** Because all who live in Christ remain united in the communion of saints and can intercede for one another.
- 3. What is purgatory?** The final purification of those who die in God's grace and friendship but are not yet perfectly purified.
- 4. Why pray for the dead?** Because the Church entrusts the dead to God's mercy and prays for their purification and eternal rest.
- 5. What do Christians finally hope for?** The resurrection of the body, the final judgement and eternal life with God.

PRAYER Mary, Mother of God, pray for me. Saints of God, pray that I may persevere in Christ. Lord, remember the faithful departed and bring them to the fullness of your light. Amen.

THIS WEEK Visit the church outside Mass if possible. Identify an image or statue of Mary or a saint and ask what that person's life teaches about following Christ.

Liturgy and the Seven Sacraments

REMEMBER In the sacred liturgy Christ continues his saving work in the Church. The seven sacraments are effective signs of grace entrusted by Christ to the Church.

Liturgy is the public worship of Christ and his Body, not a performance staged for an audience. Christ is the principal actor: he sanctifies his people and draws them into the worship he offers to the Father.

A sacrament is an outward sign that truly gives the grace it signifies because Christ acts through it. The seven sacraments are Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Matrimony.

The sacraments are grouped as initiation, healing and service of communion. Their fruit depends on God's faithful action and on the recipient's disposition. They do not work by magic, but neither are they only subjective reminders.

TALK ABOUT IT What changes when worship is understood as Christ acting in his Church rather than simply as people expressing their feelings about God?

THE ESSENTIALS

- 1. What is the liturgy?** The public worship of Christ and his Church in which Christ sanctifies us and we worship the Father.
- 2. What is a sacrament?** An effective sign of grace instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church.
- 3. How many sacraments are there?** Seven.
- 4. Which are the sacraments of initiation?** Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.
- 5. Are sacraments only symbols?** No. They signify and truly communicate the grace Christ promises.

PRAYER Lord Jesus, teach me to recognise you acting in the liturgy. Prepare me to receive your sacraments with faith, reverence and a heart open to grace. Amen.

THIS WEEK At Sunday Mass, notice the movement from the Liturgy of the Word to the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Write down one sign, gesture or prayer you want explained.

Baptism: Dying and Rising with Christ

REMEMBER Baptism by true water and the Trinitarian form frees from all sin, gives new birth in the Holy Spirit, incorporates us into Christ and the Church, and imprints an indelible sacramental character.

In Baptism you will not merely announce that you have changed your mind. God will act sacramentally. All sin is forgiven: original sin and every personal sin committed before Baptism, together with all punishment due to those sins.

Baptism gives sanctifying grace, the theological virtues and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. You become an adopted child of God, a member of Christ and part of the Church. The baptismal character marks you permanently for Christian worship and mission.

Because Baptism forgives every previous sin, an unbaptised catechumen does not make sacramental Confession before Baptism. Preparation instead includes repentance, examination of life and the sincere renunciation of sin.

TALK ABOUT IT What does it mean to you that Baptism is not mainly your promise to God, but first God's saving action upon you?

THE ESSENTIALS

- 1. What is essential for Baptism?** A washing with true water together with the Trinitarian form and the intention to baptise as the Church does.
- 2. What sins does Baptism forgive?** All sins committed before Baptism, including original sin.
- 3. What positive gift does Baptism give?** New birth in grace, the Holy Spirit, adoption as God's child and incorporation into Christ and the Church.
- 4. Can Baptism be repeated?** No. It gives an indelible sacramental character.
- 5. Should a catechumen go to sacramental Confession before Baptism?** No. Baptism itself forgives all previous sin; the catechumen should nevertheless repent sincerely and prepare for a changed life.

PRAYER Father, prepare me to die and rise with Christ in Baptism. Give me true repentance, strong faith and joy in the new life you promise. Amen.

THIS WEEK Read John 3:1-8, Romans 6:3-11 and Titus 3:4-7. Write one sentence answering: What does God do in Baptism?

Confirmation and the Gift of the Holy Spirit

REMEMBER Confirmation completes and strengthens baptismal grace, gives a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit, binds the baptised more firmly to the Church and strengthens them for witness and mission.

Adult Christian initiation normally celebrates Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist together. This shows clearly that initiation is one sacramental mystery: new birth, strengthening by the Spirit and Eucharistic communion belong together.

In Confirmation the minister lays a hand upon you and anoints your forehead with sacred chrism using the Church's sacramental form. The sacrament deepens grace, strengthens the gifts of the Holy Spirit and imprints an indelible character.

Confirmation is not a graduation or a reward for having completed classes. Its grace is ordered to mature Christian witness: courage, fidelity, service, evangelisation and perseverance in the life begun at Baptism.

TALK ABOUT IT Where in your life do you most need the Holy Spirit's strength in order to live openly and faithfully as a Christian?

THE ESSENTIALS

- 1. How does Confirmation relate to Baptism?** It completes and strengthens baptismal grace; it does not make Baptism real for the first time.
- 2. What sign is used?** The laying on of the hand and anointing with sacred chrism with the sacramental words.
- 3. What does Confirmation give?** A special outpouring of the Holy Spirit, deeper grace, stronger ecclesial bond and strength for witness.
- 4. Can Confirmation be repeated?** No. It imprints an indelible sacramental character.
- 5. When is an adult catechumen normally confirmed?** Immediately after Baptism in the same celebration, unless a serious reason requires otherwise.

PRAYER Come, Holy Spirit. Give me wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord. Make me a faithful witness to Christ. Amen.

THIS WEEK Learn the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Ask which gift you most need now and pray for it each day.

The Eucharist and the Holy Mass

REMEMBER In the Eucharist Jesus Christ is truly, really and substantially present - Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. The Mass sacramentally makes present his one sacrifice and Holy Communion unites us intimately with him and his Church.

At the Last Supper Jesus took bread and wine and gave them as his Body and Blood. In the Eucharistic Prayer, by Christ's words and the power of the Holy Spirit, the whole substance of bread and wine becomes the Body and Blood of Christ while the appearances remain. The Church calls this transubstantiation.

The Mass does not make Christ die again. The one sacrifice of Calvary is made sacramentally present in an unbloody manner. The Church joins her thanksgiving, praise, intercession and self-offering to Christ's perfect offering to the Father.

Holy Communion is therefore not ordinary food or a merely symbolic act of fellowship. Because Communion expresses full ecclesial and sacramental unity, a catechumen waits until Baptism and Confirmation before receiving it.

TALK ABOUT IT If the consecrated Host still looks like bread, what kind of faith is required to believe Christ's words about what it truly is?

THE ESSENTIALS

- 1. Who is present in the Eucharist?** Jesus Christ, truly, really and substantially, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity.
- 2. What is transubstantiation?** The change of the whole substance of bread and wine into Christ's Body and Blood while the appearances remain.
- 3. Is the Mass another sacrifice in addition to Calvary?** No. The one sacrifice of Christ is made sacramentally present.
- 4. Why is Sunday Mass central?** The Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life and Sunday is the Lord's Day of resurrection and worship.
- 5. May an unbaptised catechumen receive Holy Communion?** No. Eucharistic Communion follows Baptism and Confirmation in Christian initiation.

PRAYER Jesus, Bread of Life, increase my faith in your Eucharistic presence. Teach me to long for the day when I may receive you sacramentally in full communion with your Church. Amen.

THIS WEEK At Mass, remain prayerfully attentive during the Eucharistic Prayer. After Mass, spend a few minutes before the tabernacle and speak honestly to Jesus about your desire for Communion.

The Sacraments of Healing and Vocation

REMEMBER Christ continues to heal, forgive and call his people through Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Matrimony. These sacraments belong to the lifelong Catholic life into which Baptism opens the door.

After Baptism, serious sin is reconciled through the Sacrament of Penance. The penitent examines conscience, has contrition, confesses sins honestly, receives absolution from a priest and performs the assigned penance. Venial sins may also be confessed and regular Confession strengthens conversion.

Anointing of the Sick is for Catholics who are seriously ill, weakened by old age or facing a significant deterioration in health; it is not only a last-minute ritual. It gives strength, peace, forgiveness when appropriate and union with Christ's suffering.

Holy Orders configures bishops, priests and deacons for ordained service.

Matrimony establishes a covenant between one man and one woman ordered to their good and the procreation and education of children; between the baptised Christ raises it to a sacrament.

TALK ABOUT IT Which of these sacraments most changes your picture of what lifelong Catholic life will actually look like after Baptism?

THE ESSENTIALS

1. What is Penance for? The forgiveness of sins committed after Baptism and the restoration or strengthening of communion with God and the Church.

2. Does a catechumen receive Penance before Baptism? No. Baptism forgives all previous sin.

3. Who should receive Anointing of the Sick? A baptised Catholic seriously ill, weakened by old age or whose condition has become more serious, according to the Church's law and pastoral judgement.

4. What is Holy Orders? The sacrament by which bishops, priests and deacons are ordained for sacred ministry.

5. What is Matrimony? The lifelong covenant of one man and one woman, ordered to their good and to children; between baptised persons it is a sacrament.

PRAYER Christ our physician and shepherd, heal what is wounded in me and teach me to receive every vocation and sacrament as a gift ordered to holiness and service. Amen.

THIS WEEK Ask the priest to explain how Confession works in your parish so that, after Baptism, you will not approach your first Confession with unnecessary anxiety.

Freedom, Conscience, Virtue and Sin

REMEMBER Christian freedom is the power, healed by grace, to choose the good. Conscience must be formed in truth. Virtue makes good action stable, while sin is a free offence against God, reason, truth and rightly ordered love.

The commandments and Beatitudes are not rival visions. The commandments identify fundamental goods and boundaries; the Beatitudes reveal the interior shape of life in Christ: poverty of spirit, mercy, purity of heart, hunger for righteousness and peacemaking.

Conscience is not a private permission slip. It is the judgement of reason about the moral quality of an act and must be formed by Scripture, Church teaching, prayer, sound counsel and honest attention to reality. We must follow a certain conscience while also taking responsibility for forming it well.

Mortal sin involves grave matter, full knowledge and deliberate consent; it destroys sanctifying grace in the baptised. Venial sin wounds charity without destroying it. Temptation, intrusive thoughts, accidents and acts without sufficient freedom are not the same as deliberate sin.

TALK ABOUT IT What is the difference between "doing whatever I want" and the Christian idea of freedom for the good?

THE ESSENTIALS

- 1. What is Christian freedom?** The capacity to choose and live the true good, healed and strengthened by grace.
- 2. What is conscience?** A judgement of practical reason by which a person recognises the moral quality of a concrete act.
- 3. How is conscience formed?** By truth: Scripture, Church teaching, prayer, sound reason, virtue and honest counsel.
- 4. What makes a sin mortal?** Grave matter, full knowledge and deliberate consent together.
- 5. Is temptation itself a sin?** No. Sin requires a sufficiently free act of the will.

PRAYER Lord, give me a truthful conscience, hatred of sin without fear or scrupulosity, and the virtues I need to love what is good steadily and freely. Amen.

THIS WEEK Review the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes. Choose one commandment and one Beatitude that speak most directly to your present life.

Love in Concrete Life

REMEMBER Catholic morality protects the dignity of the human person and orders every part of life towards love of God and neighbour: life, sexuality, family, truth, possessions, work, justice, mercy and the common good.

Human life is sacred from conception until natural death. We therefore reject direct abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, deliberate destruction of human embryos and intentional killing of the innocent, while also insisting on care for mothers, children, the sick, disabled, poor, elderly, imprisoned and vulnerable.

Human sexuality is a gift ordered to faithful married love and openness to life. Chastity integrates sexuality according to one's state of life. Marriage is exclusive and lifelong; sexual intimacy belongs within marriage. Fornication, adultery, pornography, masturbation and contraceptive acts misuse sexuality by separating it from the faithful, total and life-giving meaning of marital love. Same-sex attraction is not itself a sin; every person has equal dignity and every Christian is called to chastity. Spouses may, for serious reasons, space births by morally licit natural methods while remaining open to life.

Love also governs money, speech and society. Christians must reject theft, fraud, racism, exploitation, calumny, lying and indifference to injustice. The works of mercy, care for creation, solidarity with the poor and concern for the common good are not optional additions to faith.

TALK ABOUT IT Which area of Catholic moral teaching most needs patient explanation for you rather than a quick rule?

THE ESSENTIALS

- 1. Why does the Church defend human life?** Because every human person bears God's image and has an inviolable dignity that does not depend on ability, usefulness or stage of development.
- 2. What is chastity?** The virtue that integrates sexuality within the person according to one's state of life and God's design.
- 3. What is marriage ordered towards?** The good of husband and wife and the procreation and education of children; marital love remains open to life.
- 4. Does Christian morality concern social justice?** Yes. Love of neighbour includes justice, solidarity, care for the poor and responsibility for the common good.
- 5. What should you do when a teaching is difficult?** Seek understanding honestly, pray, ask questions and avoid pretending assent while also avoiding dismissing the Church before understanding her reasons.

PRAYER God of truth and mercy, order my desires, relationships, speech, possessions and choices towards genuine love. Give me courage where conversion is costly. Amen.

THIS WEEK Choose one work of mercy to practise this week. If there is a moral teaching you find especially difficult, write the actual question down and bring it to the priest or mentor.

Prayer and the Ordinary Catholic Life

REMEMBER Catholic life is sustained by Sunday Mass, daily prayer, Scripture, the liturgical year, sacramental life, fasting, charity, devotion and participation in the mission of the Church.

Prayer is relationship with God: blessing, adoration, petition, intercession, thanksgiving and praise. Catholics pray to the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit, both liturgically and personally. The Lord's Prayer is the pattern of Christian prayer.

Sunday Mass and Holy Days of Obligation form the stable centre of Catholic worship. After initiation, the Church also asks a minimum sacramental and penitential discipline: receive the Eucharist at least during the Easter season, confess serious sins at least annually, observe prescribed days of fast and abstinence, and support the Church according to ability. Daily prayer need not be elaborate: morning offering, Scripture, the Our Father, examination of conscience, grace at meals, the Rosary or other devotions can form a realistic rule. Devotions serve the liturgy; they do not replace it.

Catholic discipleship is also missionary and charitable. Every Christian receives gifts for service, belongs to a concrete parish and is sent to witness to Christ in family, work, friendship and public life. The Christian life is not private spirituality.

TALK ABOUT IT What simple rhythm of prayer and worship could realistically become normal in your life rather than an intense plan that lasts only two weeks?

THE ESSENTIALS

- 1. What is the centre of weekly Catholic worship?** Sunday Mass.
- 2. What is the model of Christian prayer?** The Lord's Prayer taught by Jesus.
- 3. Should Catholics read Scripture personally?** Yes. Scripture belongs at the heart of liturgy, prayer and catechesis.
- 4. What minimum disciplines belong to Catholic life?** Sunday Mass and Holy Days, worthy reception of the Eucharist, Confession when needed, the Church's fast and abstinence, and support of the Church according to ability.
- 5. Are lay Catholics called to mission?** Yes. Every baptised person shares in the Church's mission according to vocation and gifts.

PRAYER Father, teach me to pray. Make Sunday worship, Scripture, charity and service ordinary parts of my life, and give me perseverance when enthusiasm fades. Amen.

THIS WEEK Write a simple rule for the next seven days: Sunday Mass, ten minutes of daily prayer, one Scripture reading and one act of charity. Keep it realistic.

Election, Scrutinies and the Battle for the Heart

REMEMBER After sufficient growth in faith, conversion and Christian life, the Church may call a catechumen to Election. The elect enter Lent as a period of deeper purification and enlightenment before the Easter sacraments.

Election is not a prize for passing a test. The Church listens to the testimony of godparents and those who have accompanied you and discerns whether there is a real intention to receive the sacraments, sufficient knowledge of Christian teaching, a spirit of faith and charity, and growth in conversion.

The Scrutinies are celebrated for the elect during Lent. They are not examinations and must never become public disclosure of private sins. They are prayers of exorcism and intercession asking Christ to uncover and heal what is weak, strengthen what is good and free the elect from the power of sin and the evil one. This period becomes more prayerful and interior. The focus shifts from accumulating information towards repentance, spiritual combat, desire for Christ, fasting, prayer and charity.

TALK ABOUT IT What do you most want Christ to heal, strengthen or set in order in you before Baptism - without feeling any need to disclose private sins publicly?

THE ESSENTIALS

- 1. What is Election?** The Church's liturgical discernment and choice of catechumens judged ready for the final preparation for initiation.
- 2. When is it normally celebrated?** On the First Sunday of Lent, ordinarily with the diocesan bishop.
- 3. What are catechumens called after Election?** The elect.
- 4. What are the Scrutinies?** Lenten rites of prayer and exorcism for purification, healing and strengthening of the elect.
- 5. Are Scrutinies public Confession?** No. No one should be required to disclose private sins in the rite or catechesis.

PRAYER Jesus, light of the world, search my heart with mercy. Free me from what enslaves, strengthen what is good and prepare me to renounce sin and belong wholly to you. Amen.

THIS WEEK Take Lent seriously: choose one form of fasting, one additional prayer and one concrete work of charity. Keep it faithful rather than dramatic.

Creed, Lord's Prayer and Final Preparation

REMEMBER The elect are entrusted with the Church's faith and prayer as the final preparation deepens: the Creed gathers what the Church believes, and the Lord's Prayer reveals the life of God's adopted children.

The presentations of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer express something profound: the faith is received before it is personally professed, and Christian prayer is learned within the praying Church. At Baptism you will renounce sin and profess this faith for yourself.

You should now be able to explain the core of the faith in ordinary words, but perfect memory is not the standard. More important are sincere faith in Christ, sufficient understanding, conversion of life, desire for the sacraments, prayer and willingness to live within the Church.

Baptism will forgive every sin of your past. Do not attempt sacramental Confession beforehand. Instead make a peaceful review of your life before God, repent sincerely, forgive others, repair what reasonably can be repaired and ask for the grace to begin anew.

TALK ABOUT IT If you were asked, "Why do you want to be baptised now?", what would you say in your own words?

THE ESSENTIALS

- 1. What does the Creed give us?** A concise profession of the apostolic faith into which we are baptised.
- 2. Why is the Lord's Prayer important?** Jesus gave it as the pattern of Christian prayer and it expresses our life as children of the Father.
- 3. Must every answer be memorised perfectly before Baptism?** No. Sufficient understanding, real faith, conversion and readiness matter more than polished language.
- 4. Should the elect make sacramental Confession before Baptism?** No. Baptism forgives all prior sin.
- 5. What should be done about past wrongs?** Repent sincerely and, where reasonably possible and safe, repair harm and seek reconciliation.

PRAYER Father, I believe; help my unbelief. Forgive, heal and prepare me. Teach me to say with truth the faith of your Church and the prayer your Son has given us. Amen.

THIS WEEK Pray the Creed and the Lord's Prayer slowly every day. Reconcile with someone if this can be done wisely and safely, or take one concrete step towards repairing past harm.

The Easter Vigil and the Sacraments of Initiation

REMEMBER At the Easter Vigil the elect normally receive the three sacraments of Christian initiation together: Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist. You die and rise with Christ, are sealed with the Holy Spirit and are welcomed to the Lord's table.

The Vigil begins in darkness and moves through light and the proclamation of salvation history towards the baptismal liturgy. The saints are invoked, the water is blessed, you renounce sin, profess the faith and are baptised with water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

You are then clothed in the white garment and entrusted with the light of Christ. Normally you are immediately confirmed with sacred chrism. The Mass continues and you receive Holy Communion for the first time.

The sacraments are God's action, not a performance you must execute perfectly. The ministers will guide you. Prepare through prayer, appropriate fasting, practical rehearsal and peaceful trust. The day is the beginning of Catholic life, not graduation from it.

TALK ABOUT IT Which part of the Easter Vigil are you most longing for, and what part makes you most nervous?

THE ESSENTIALS

1. What sacraments does an adult catechumen normally receive at initiation?

Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist.

2. What is the essential action of Baptism? Washing with true water while the Trinitarian baptismal form is spoken.

3. What follows Baptism? The newly baptised is normally confirmed and then receives Holy Communion.

4. What is the white garment? A sign of the new dignity and life of one clothed in Christ.

5. What is the baptismal candle? A sign of the light of the risen Christ entrusted to the newly baptised.

PRAYER Risen Lord Jesus, bring to completion what you have begun in me. Through water and the Holy Spirit make me your own, feed me with your Body and Blood, and keep me faithful until death. Amen.

THIS WEEK Confirm the practical arrangements with the parish. Pray rather than cram. If possible, spend quiet time before the Blessed Sacrament and ask the parish to pray for you by name.

Mystagogy: Living as a Newly Baptised Catholic

REMEMBER Initiation is a beginning. Mystagogy helps the newly baptised understand the mysteries by living them: Sunday Eucharist, prayer, charity, Confession, parish communion and mission now become ordinary Catholic life.

After Baptism you are not merely a person who has completed RCIA. You are a Catholic Christian with a new sacramental life, rights and responsibilities, a parish home and a vocation within the Body of Christ.

The Easter season is a privileged time to reflect on what you have received. The Eucharist becomes the weekly centre. When you sin after Baptism, especially in grave matters, the Sacrament of Penance is now the ordinary sacramental path of reconciliation. Learn to use it peacefully and regularly.

Mystagogy also asks: What gifts has God given you for others? Mature Catholic life includes service, friendship, works of mercy, learning, stewardship and evangelisation. The parish should continue to accompany you rather than disappearing after the Vigil.

TALK ABOUT IT Six months from now, what signs would show that Baptism has become a way of life rather than a beautiful memory?

THE ESSENTIALS

- 1. What is mystagogy?** Postbaptismal catechesis that deepens the neophyte's experience of the sacraments and life in the Church.
- 2. How long should Catholic formation continue?** For life.
- 3. What is now the centre of weekly life?** Sunday Mass and the Eucharist.
- 4. What sacrament restores communion after serious post-baptismal sin?** The Sacrament of Penance.
- 5. What is a neophyte called to become?** A mature disciple who worships, grows in holiness, serves, belongs and shares the Gospel.

PRAYER Father, thank you for making me your child in Christ. Keep me faithful to the grace of Baptism, nourished by the Eucharist, humble in repentance and generous in mission. Amen.

THIS WEEK Choose your next three concrete steps after initiation: a regular Confession rhythm, one parish relationship or ministry, and one continuing way to learn the faith.

First Pastoral Check

Do this early, before anyone begins planning an Easter date.

FIRST QUESTION Have you ever been baptised with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit?

If the answer may be yes, the priest must investigate before treating you as unbaptised. A valid Baptism is never repeated. If you are already validly baptised, the correct route is Reception into Full Communion or another appropriate pathway.

Area	What to establish
Baptism status	Never baptised / unsure / evidence of a possible prior Baptism. Record places, dates, denomination and witnesses if known.
Age	If aged 14 or over, the parish follows diocesan arrangements concerning the bishop's role in adult initiation.
Marriage history	Current marriage, previous marriages, civil marriages or unions of either party must be disclosed early. Do not assume Baptism automatically resolves a prior bond.
Previous Christian formation	What has the person already learned or practised? Do not teach as though every inquirer begins from the same place.
Freedom and motive	Is the person freely seeking Christ, or mainly responding to pressure from a spouse, family or wedding plan?
Life situation	Work, caring responsibilities, disability, language, literacy, neurodiversity, health and transport may require adaptation.
Safeguarding	Use appropriate parish safeguarding arrangements. Private spiritual matters are not for group disclosure.
Sponsor	Identify a suitable person to accompany the inquirer and later, if appropriate, serve as godparent.

DO NOT SET A BAPTISM DATE TOO EARLY The catechumenate is readiness-based. The Easter Vigil is the normal time for initiation, but no one should be rushed to fit a calendar. The period of catechumenate can be extended when faith, conversion, canonical matters or pastoral circumstances require it.

The Major Rites

The approved liturgical book controls the wording and celebration. This is only a map.

1. Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens

After the beginnings of faith and conversion, the inquirers publicly express their intention to follow Christ. The Church accepts them, signs them with the Cross, welcomes them to hear the Word of God and enrolls them among the catechumens. Their names are recorded as required.

2. Celebrations during the Catechumenate

The rite provides celebrations of the Word, blessings, minor exorcisms and other rites. These are prayers of the Church, not theatrical extras. They help the catechumen grow in faith, freedom and conversion.

3. Rite of Election or Enrolment of Names

Normally on the First Sunday of Lent, after testimony and discernment, the Church calls catechumens judged ready for the final preparation. In Nottingham this is celebrated diocesanelly at the Cathedral. From this rite they are called the elect.

4. Scrutinies

On the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent, the scrutinies ordinarily pray for the elect's purification, deliverance from sin and strengthening in Christ. They are not public examinations and do not ask the elect to reveal private sins.

5. Presentations and Holy Saturday preparation

The Creed and Lord's Prayer are entrusted to the elect according to the rite. Other preparation rites may take place on Holy Saturday.

6. Sacraments of Initiation

Normally at the Easter Vigil, the elect profess the faith, are baptised, then confirmed and receive the Eucharist. Christian initiation is one sacramental whole.

7. Mystagogy

During the Easter season, the neophytes deepen their understanding through lived experience of the sacraments, Scripture, community, charity and mission.

AT SUNDAY MASS Catechumens participate in the Liturgy of the Word. Where the parish celebrates the dismissal provided by the rite, they are sent to continue reflecting on the Word with the Church's prayer; they are not "sent away" because they are unwelcome.

Sponsor and Godparent

A real Christian companion, not simply a ceremonial name.

A sponsor accompanies the inquirer and catechumen, knows the person sufficiently to witness to growth in faith and intention, and helps them become part of Catholic life. The sponsor at Acceptance and the godparent at Election and initiation may be the same person, but the rite allows another suitable person to take the later role.

What matters	In practice
Chosen and willing	The person is genuinely chosen for the role and intends to fulfil it.
Catholic life	A Catholic who is confirmed, has received the Eucharist and lives a life of faith in keeping with the role.
Age	Ordinarily at least sixteen, unless lawful provision or a just exception applies.
Canonical freedom	Not bound by a canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared.
Relationship	A godparent may not be the father or mother of the person being baptised. Other family relationships are handled according to the law, the rite and pastoral judgement.
Practical accompaniment	Prays, attends rites, introduces parish life, discusses the conversations, models Sunday worship and remains present after Baptism.

GOOD SPONSOR Choose someone whose Catholic life you would be happy to imitate in ten years, not merely the person who would be most flattered to be asked.

Things to Know Clearly

These are not an examination. A catechumen should increasingly understand these truths and be able to explain them in ordinary words.

- 1. Who is God?** The one eternal Creator, infinitely perfect, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- 2. Who is Jesus Christ?** The eternal Son of God made man, true God and true man.
- 3. Why did Christ become man?** For our salvation: to reveal the Father, redeem us from sin and share divine life with us.
- 4. What is the Paschal Mystery?** Christ's Passion, death, Resurrection and Ascension by which he conquers sin and death.
- 5. Who is the Holy Spirit?** The third Person of the Trinity, Lord and giver of life.
- 6. What is grace?** God's free gift of his life and help, healing and sanctifying us through Christ.
- 7. What is the Church?** The people of God, Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit, visibly united in faith, sacraments and apostolic communion.
- 8. What are the four marks of the Church?** One, holy, catholic and apostolic.
- 9. What is Sacred Scripture?** The inspired written Word of God.
- 10. What is Apostolic Tradition?** The living transmission of the apostolic faith in the Church.
- 11. What is the Magisterium?** The Church's teaching office exercised by the Pope and bishops in communion with him.
- 12. How many sacraments are there?** Seven.
- 13. Which are the sacraments of initiation?** Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.
- 14. What is Baptism?** The sacrament of new birth by water and the word, freeing from sin and incorporating us into Christ and the Church.
- 15. What does Baptism forgive?** All sin committed before Baptism and all punishment due to it.
- 16. Can Baptism be repeated?** No. It gives an indelible sacramental character.
- 17. What is Confirmation?** The sacrament that completes and strengthens baptismal grace with a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- 18. Who is present in the Eucharist?** Jesus Christ, truly, really and substantially, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity.
- 19. What is transubstantiation?** The change of the whole substance of bread and wine into Christ's Body and Blood while the appearances remain.
- 20. What is the Mass?** The sacramental making-present of Christ's one sacrifice and the Church's supreme act of Eucharistic worship.

Things to Know Clearly

- 21. Why do Catholics go to Confession?** For sacramental forgiveness and reconciliation for sins committed after Baptism.
- 22. Does a catechumen confess sacramentally before Baptism?** No. Baptism forgives all prior sin.
- 23. What is Anointing of the Sick?** The sacrament by which Christ strengthens and heals the seriously ill and those weakened by age.
- 24. What is Holy Orders?** The sacrament of ordained ministry in the three degrees of bishop, priest and deacon.
- 25. What is Matrimony?** The lifelong covenant of one man and one woman ordered to their good and to children; between baptised persons it is a sacrament.
- 26. What is conscience?** A judgement of reason about the moral quality of a concrete act, which must be formed in truth.
- 27. What is mortal sin?** Grave sin committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent.
- 28. What is venial sin?** Sin that wounds charity without destroying sanctifying grace.
- 29. Is temptation itself sin?** No.
- 30. What are the two great commandments?** Love God with your whole being and love your neighbour as yourself.
- 31. What is the Lord's Prayer?** The Our Father taught by Jesus, the model of Christian prayer.
- 32. Why is Sunday Mass essential?** Sunday is the Lord's Day and the Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life.
- 33. Do Catholics worship Mary and the saints?** No. Adoration belongs to God alone; saints are honoured and asked for intercession.
- 34. What is purgatory?** The final purification of those who die in God's grace but still need purification.
- 35. What is Christian hope?** Hope in God's promises, the resurrection of the body and eternal life.
- 36. What is the Rite of Acceptance?** The first major liturgical step by which an inquirer becomes a catechumen.
- 37. What is Election?** The Church's call of catechumens judged ready for the final preparation for initiation.
- 38. What are the Scrutinies?** Lenten rites of purification and strengthening for the elect.
- 39. What normally happens at the Easter Vigil?** The elect receive Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist.
- 40. What is mystagogy?** The postbaptismal deepening of sacramental life, faith, community and mission.

Readiness Discernment

Readiness is not perfect memory, social confidence or a fixed number of weeks.

Before Acceptance into the Catechumenate

- Has heard the first proclamation of Jesus Christ and shows an initial faith or desire for faith.
- Freely intends to continue exploring the Christian life and shows the beginnings of conversion.
- Has some experience of prayer and contact with the Christian community.
- Understands that Acceptance begins a real catechumenal commitment but does not guarantee a fixed Baptism date.

Before Election

- Has a developed intention to receive Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist.
- Has sufficient knowledge of Christian teaching according to capacity, not merely memorised vocabulary.
- Has grown in prayer, Sunday worship, charity and participation in parish life.
- Shows genuine conversion: a willingness to turn from grave sin and live according to the Gospel.
- Has resolved major canonical or pastoral questions sufficiently for initiation to proceed.
- Godparent, catechists and parish can give honest testimony to the person's readiness.

Before the Sacraments of Initiation

- Professes the Catholic faith sincerely and freely.
- Understands the sacramental meaning of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.
- Has celebrated the Lenten rites and entered a serious period of prayer and conversion.
- Has a sincere sorrow for sin and intention to live a Christian life.
- Knows the practical shape of the Easter Vigil without being expected to memorise every response.
- Is not being rushed merely because Easter has arrived.

PASTORAL PRINCIPLE Difficulty, disability, limited English, anxiety or a need for more time calls for adaptation, not humiliation. Readiness is judged according to the person's capacity and genuine response to grace.

DO NOT Do not demand disclosure of private sins to catechists or groups, use public interrogation, shame an inquirer for questions, or treat attendance sheets as proof of conversion.

A Simple Rule of Christian Life

Start before Baptism. Continue after it. Keep the rule small enough to be faithful.

Rhythm	Simple practice
Daily	Make the Sign of the Cross; pray the Our Father; read a short passage of Scripture; ask for grace to live the Gospel.
Morning and night	Offer the day to God; at night give thanks, review the day peacefully and ask mercy for failures.
Sunday	Attend Mass faithfully. Before initiation, participate without receiving Communion; after initiation, receive worthily when properly disposed.
Weekly	Do one deliberate work of mercy or service; speak to another Catholic rather than trying to learn the faith entirely alone.
Regularly after Baptism	Receive the Sacrament of Penance; learn a realistic rhythm rather than waiting until fear or crisis.
At home	Keep a crucifix or holy image visible; learn the Creed; use the Bible; let faith become part of ordinary decisions and relationships.
With the parish	Build real relationships, join one suitable form of service or formation, and learn whom to ask when you need help.
When things go wrong	Begin again. Return to prayer, Mass and Confession rather than letting a difficult week become permanent distance.

A GOOD RULE IS BORING ENOUGH TO LAST Ordinary faithfulness - Sunday Mass, short daily prayer, Scripture, charity, friendship and regular Confession after Baptism - forms a stronger disciple than occasional bursts of religious intensity.

Special Cases and Danger of Death

Do not force every person through the same route.

Already baptised

Use Reception into Full Communion or another appropriate pathway. Do not treat a validly baptised Christian as a catechumen awaiting Baptism.

Child of catechetical age

The RCIA contains a distinct form adapted for children who have reached catechetical age. Do not simply hand an adult book to a child.

Uncatechised baptised Catholic

This is not the unbaptised catechumenate. Preparation for Confirmation and Eucharist is adapted to the person's baptismal status.

Marriage or prior bond

Tell the priest early. Natural and sacramental marriage bonds require proper canonical discernment. Do not promise that Baptism by itself solves a marriage case.

Disability or learning need

Adapt pace, language, format and response expectations while preserving the substance of faith and sacramental readiness.

Danger of death

Contact a priest immediately. The Church provides an abbreviated initiation for a person in danger of death. Canon law allows adult Baptism in danger of death with a basic knowledge of principal truths, manifested intention to receive Baptism and a promise to observe the Christian religion. The priest determines what can be celebrated.

Death of a catechumen

If a catechumen dies before Baptism, contact the parish. The Church treats catechumens as Christian faithful for the purposes of ecclesiastical funerals and commends them confidently to God's mercy.

Uncertainty about prior Baptism

Do not simply baptise again. The priest investigates the facts and, if necessary, follows the Church's norms concerning doubtful Baptism.

EMERGENCY If an unbaptised person is in immediate danger of death and no priest or deacon can be reached, any person can baptise validly with true water, the proper Trinitarian formula and the intention to do what the Church does. Contact the parish afterwards so the Baptism can be recorded and the remaining rites supplied as appropriate.

Sources and Parish Authority

This booklet is a parish catechetical companion. It does not replace the approved liturgical books, diocesan directions, canon law, the Catechism of the Catholic Church or the pastoral judgement of the bishop and parish priest.

Primary sources

- Sacred Scripture, with the Sunday Lectionary and the biblical texts indicated throughout this book.
- Catechism of the Catholic Church, especially 1-1065 (the profession of faith), 1066-1690 (liturgy and sacraments), 1691-2557 (life in Christ and prayer), and especially 1213-1284 on Baptism.
- Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, approved for use in England and Wales, including its General Introduction and Introductory Material.
- Code of Canon Law, especially canons 206; 788-789; 849-878, particularly 851, 864-866 and 872-874; and the norms governing the other sacraments and marriage where applicable.
- Current directions of the Diocese of Nottingham, including the diocesan Rite of Election and arrangements made by the bishop for adult initiation.
- Parish safeguarding policy and current diocesan safeguarding requirements.
- Deharbe, A Full Catechism of the Catholic Religion, used only as a traditional catechetical reference for concise question-and-answer structure; current magisterial, liturgical and canonical sources govern doctrine and discipline.

Authority order for practical use

1. The approved liturgical books and universal law of the Church.
2. Current diocesan norms and directions of the bishop.
3. The pastoral judgement of the parish priest.
4. This catechumenate companion as the ordinary parish teaching spine.

FINAL PRINCIPLE The goal is not to manufacture a person who can pass a Catholic quiz. The goal is a disciple who freely believes in Jesus Christ, turns from sin, desires Baptism, is sufficiently formed in the faith and Christian life, and is ready to enter the sacramental and missionary life of the Church.