

The Initial Interview

The first occurrence of formal discernment takes place in the Period of Inquiry at an initial interview. The initial interview should occur as early in the Period of Inquiry as possible and involve the inquirer and a designated member of the team—the pastor, the coordinator of the process, or another member of the team.

The goal of the initial interview is to gain a sense of the inquirer's journey of faith, relationship with Christ, and commitment to living as a disciple of Jesus Christ, as well as any experience the inquirer might have had of being part of a community of believers.

The initial interview establishes the starting point of the journey of the inquirer with the Catholic faith community. Discernment will reflect movement from where the inquirer is at the beginning of the process to readiness for each of the major rituals.

The key information gained through the initial interview needs to be shared with members of the team so they can know as much as possible about the inquirer as well as be informed about some of the inquirer's questions, concerns, and issues.

Some key elements important to explore during the initial interview include:

Personal Information

Basic contact information (addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, family information, and friends or other personal connections within the parish) will be important in order to provide important ongoing information and communication.

It will also be necessary to identify the marital status of the person being interviewed. It is critical to know if a previous marriage existed that might require an annulment. (Check with your local diocesan chancery. Some dioceses require that the annulment

process be completed prior to the Rite for Entrance into the Catechumenate.)

It is also helpful to know whether the person being interviewed has any children who might also be a part of the initiation process. If so, it will be helpful to know the ages of the children and whether they are baptized and catechized.

Baptismal Status

If the inquirer is baptized, it is important to find out whether he or she was baptized in the Catholic Church or in another Christian tradition. The local Catholic diocesan chancery can provide a list of baptisms accepted by the Catholic Church.

If the inquirer is baptized, request a copy of the baptismal record. It is important to have this information prior to the celebration of the first rite to determine whether the Rite for Entrance into the Catechumenate (for the unbaptized) or the Rite of Welcoming the Candidates (for the baptized) is to be celebrated.

Catechetical Background

Catechesis is more than passing on knowledge or information about the Catholic faith. It also involves a relationship with Jesus Christ. (See the *General Directory for Catechesis* 80.) Therefore, in exploring a person's catechetical experience prior to contact with the Catholic Church, it is important to uncover not only a person's understanding of some of the core teachings of the Christian faith but also those areas and elements of the person's life that might already relate to Jesus Christ. In other words, the initial interview should seek to gain some insight into all aspects of the faith journey that might be stepping stones to a more explicit, fruitful faith in Christ.

During the initial interview, determine the inquirer's understanding and experience of the following components of the Christian faith:

- Prayer
- Worship
- Sacraments
- Scripture
- Morality
- Creedal statements, such as those stated in the Apostles' Creed:
 - God—Father and Creator
 - Jesus—Messiah and Redeemer
 - The Holy Spirit—Advocate and Guide
 - The Communion of Saints
 - Resurrection

In addition, ask the following questions in order to identify where the person is on his or her particular faith journey at this point:

- What has brought you to inquire about becoming Catholic?
- What does the word *faith* mean to you? How has that meaning been operative in your life?

- Who has influenced you along your faith journey?
- What are you looking for or hoping to find in the Catholic Church?
- Have you ever been part of a faith community?
- What questions, concerns, or issues do you currently have about Catholicism or Catholic teachings?

Overview of the Process

It is important to convey to the inquirer the steps and periods of the process. Give assurance that the process is designed to help the inquirer examine and grow in a personal journey of faith, and that the community promises to walk with the inquirer every step of the way for as long as it takes for initial faith and conversion to happen. Explain that initiation happens when the inquirer and the Church community together can authentically celebrate the inquirer's commitment to follow Christ in the Catholic way of life.