

What Is Apprenticeship in the Catechumenate?

The Period of the Catechumenate represents the backbone of the whole OCIA process. It is the most extended period within the process and is multidimensional in its approach to building up the faith of the catechumens. Catechesis in the Catechumenate—or, for that matter, in *any* period of the OCIA process—relies on Divine Revelation. But this gift from God is communicated to the catechumen in this period through a variety of catechetical methods and in a variety of venues.

Particular Methods

One method utilized throughout the OCIA process involves the presentation of knowledge by the catechist. This occurs when doctrine and Church practices are explained. These explanations include dialogue and conversation by the catechumens so that what they are hearing from the catechist is assimilated, understood, and related to their personal lives and the life of the world as they see it.

Another catechetical method involves the exploration of basic human experience in the light of faith. Through this method the catechist helps the catechumens uncover their concerns, questions, hopes, and anxieties about life, God, and the world. Exploring basic human experience prompts catechumens to delve even more deeply into the truth of Salvation in Christ.

Another method used in this period is the witness of others, most especially the witness of the catechist and the sponsor. However, witnessing can occur by others in the community as well. Heartfelt sharing regarding how faith has made a difference in one's life, a person's full commitment to the Gospel, and a person's genuine desire to strive for holiness all combine to powerfully transmit, through word and example, the teaching of Christ as lived by the faithful.

Yet another catechetical method utilized in this period is the memorization of basic prayers, key biblical themes, formulas of worship and devotion, and simple lists (such as the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, Gifts of the Holy Spirit, and theological and moral virtues). Catechumens learn these treasures by heart in order to express the common faith vocabulary, prayers, and practices that strengthen our identity as Catholics.

Sometimes two or more of these methods are employed together for even greater effect. For example, most often doctrinal knowledge and human experience are explored together. Catechesis in this instance becomes a link between doctrine and basic life experiences. Or sometimes personal witness by the catechist on the value of the Rosary, for example, is combined with memorization and recitation of the Hail Mary. The Rosary—because of the catechist's witness—is seen for its richness and importance in one's prayer life, and the catechumens come one step closer to praying the Rosary from memory.

Particular Venues

In addition to a variety of methods employed during the Catechumenate, a variety of venues also distinguishes this period. The local Church, gathered throughout the Church year according to its seasons and formed by the Sunday Scriptures, is one important venue. Catechumens experience the Liturgy of the Word Sunday after Sunday, being sent forth after the homily to further reflect upon their experience of the liturgy. With the help of a catechist who uses the Scriptures of the day as a springboard, the catechumens enter into conversation and dialogue based on a related teaching of the Church that illumines the scriptural message and applies it to their lives.

Another venue is the world itself as catechumens put into practice the faith in which they are being formed. Their own homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, and communities all present rich opportunities to engage in apostolic works and the witness of faith. Individually or as a group, catechumens take the Gospel into the world and proclaim it by their actions of service, concern, and assistance. This experience, in turn, provides opportunities for more questions, discussion, prayer, and exploration in catechumenal gatherings that follow the Liturgy of the Word.

The Meaning of Apprenticeship

An image that captures the richness and variety of these catechumenal methods and venues is apprenticeship. Apprentices are formed when they stand next to a teacher and watch what he or she does. Apprentices also learn from a teacher the specialized vocabulary appropriate to their profession. Eventually, they put into practice what they have seen and learned in their training and continue to learn by doing. They critique themselves and are challenged by their teacher. Through their apprenticeship they have absorbed what they needed in order to become what they were not at the start.

This is how the original disciples learned. They followed Jesus and the example he provided, trusting him and walking in his footsteps. They were formed in the way, the truth, and the life by doing what they did alongside Jesus. They were not perfect in

their following. They did not always grasp what Jesus was getting at, but they certainly learned and were formed. They kept at it, allowing faith to mature in their companionship along the way.

Catechumens in the Period of the Catechumenate trust that through this long period—Sunday after Sunday and week after week coming together in the Lord’s community—they will be formed in faith as they grow in their relationship to one another and in their relationship to the Body of Christ found in the Church.

In the same way, the Church proposes to catechumens that through their apprenticeship in the Catechumenate they will become what they need to be. Through Sunday worship during the Liturgy of the Word; reflection upon the message contained in that worship; immersion in the Church Tradition conveyed by that worship; life practice, service, and apostolic witness; and the companionship and experience of other Christians in the household of the faithful, catechumens will be called by God as the Church elects them to the next stage in the OCIA process.

See the following paragraphs in the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults for more insights regarding this second period of the initiation process: catechesis conformed to the liturgical year (75.1); role of the community (75.2); rites, celebrations and Sunday Liturgy of the Word (75.3); apostolic works (75.4); duration (76); and pastoral formation (78).