



There is no set length of time that it takes to become Catholic. Different parishes and dioceses may set their own timetables. However, the Church makes clear that what is important is not meeting a schedule, but instead ensuring adequate preparation to receive the Sacraments of Initiation.

Throughout this process, there is never any pressure to convert. No one can ever be forced to embrace the Catholic faith against his or her conscience. It must always be a free choice. The decision to become fully incorporated into the Church is left to the individual and must come from the depths of the heart and soul.

### Becoming a Catholic

Eventually you reach the point where you know whether becoming a Catholic is the right decision or not. If you choose to make a permanent commitment to the Catholic faith, you will enter into a worldwide church that is made up of one billion people with different spiritualities, different nationalities, different customs and ways of life, who all share the same beliefs.

Becoming Catholic is a spiritual adventure that believers have traveled for more than 2,000 years.

But no one should embark on the journey without considerable thought, prayer, and reflection. Other people can offer information and advice, but, ultimately, you have to make the decision for yourself. Whatever you decide, you can be sure that God is with you on your spiritual journey.

### Additional Information

#### Books

- Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (USCCB Publishing).
- United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, (USCCB Publishing).
- Recovering Faith: Stories of Catholics Who Came Home*, Lorene Hanley Duquin. (Our Sunday Visitor, 2011).

#### Websites

- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org)
- Beginning Catholic: The Beginner's Guide to a Life of Faith: [www.beginningcatholic.com](http://www.beginningcatholic.com)
- The Coming Home Network International: [www.chnetwork.org](http://www.chnetwork.org)
- You may want to identify the diocese for your area in order to search for specific information about becoming Catholic in your region.*

#### Stories of Catholic Converts

- A Century of Catholic Converts*, Lorene Hanley Duquin. (Our Sunday Visitor, 2003).
- Journeys Home*, by Marcus C. Grodi. (CH Resources, 2006).
- The Long Loneliness*, by Dorothy Day. (HarperOne, 1952).
- The Seven Storey Mountain*, by Thomas Merton. (Mariner Books, 1999).
- Surprised by Truth*, by Patrick Madrid. (Basilica Press, 1994).

## What Catholics Believe

The essence of the Catholic faith is belief in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became man and revealed to us truths about a loving and merciful Father. Catholics believe in the teachings of Jesus, his death and resurrection, and his promise of eternal life.

Catholics believe that after Jesus ascended into heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit to guide and protect the Church. It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ during the Mass. It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that sins are forgiven (Jn 20:22-23). The fact that the Catholic Church has survived for over 2,000 years in spite of human weaknesses is an indication that the Holy Spirit has kept it alive and growing.

Catholics acknowledge the pope as the successor of Peter, who was placed by Jesus in a special position of

authority in the Church (Mt. 16:17-19). Catholics recognize bishops as successors of the apostles. Beyond these essential beliefs, the Catholic Church has doctrines based on Scripture and Tradition, which include seven sacraments, prayers, liturgies, and a body of teachings on morality, justice, peace, and the dignity of the human person. These teachings are not the personal opinions of the pope and bishops. They are based on Scripture, Tradition, God's law, and natural law.



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# Are You Thinking About Becoming a Catholic?

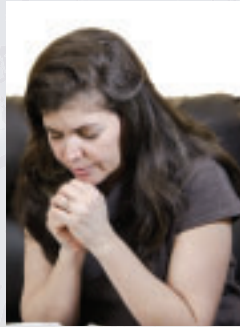


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*"The Lord waits for you to come to him, so he can show you his love and compassion. For the Lord is a faithful God"* (Isaiah 30:18)

## Responding to God's Call

No matter when you begin to consider Catholicism, rest assured that God is present from the first moment of your spiritual journey. As you begin to feel a tugging at your heart or the call of "the still small voice within," God is there. In your questions and desire to know more, God is there.



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## There are many reasons you may yearn to deepen your relationship with God.

### ✝ THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

We live in a secular culture that constantly bombards us with subtle messages that tell us we aren't good enough, we don't have enough, and we need something new to make us happy. But having more is never completely satisfying. When we begin to search for deeper meaning and purpose, we often discover a spiritual dimension inside ourselves that has never been explored before. We may begin to long for an experience of God.



### ✝ THE SEARCH FOR GOD

The search for God almost always involves a struggle with questions and doubts. Some of us wrestle with the image of God that was instilled in us as children. Some of us find ourselves wanting to know more about Jesus Christ. We may begin to pray, read Scripture, and ask other people about what they believe. We may begin to feel called by God, which we recognize in flashes of understanding, outpourings of emotion, and a desire to delve more deeply into the mystery of faith.



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### ✝ THE SEARCH FOR BELONGING

We live in a technological world, but despite our capacity for instant communication, we often feel alone. We yearn to be part of a group of people who share the same beliefs and pray together, celebrate joys and grieve losses together, and offer support



and receive strength from one another. This search involves more than looking for a church with friendly people. We soon realize that our feelings of

emptiness can only be filled in a faith community where people center their lives on Jesus Christ.

### ✝ THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

The quest for truth solely through history, philosophy, literature, or theology, often brings to light misconceptions about Catholic beliefs that have no basis in reality. However, a search that includes Scripture and Church teachings shows us Catholicism in a more truthful light. There is a strong biblical foundation to Catholic beliefs. For example, the Catholic belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist can be traced back to the earliest Christians and the Gospel of John (6:51-58). In fact, the teaching authority of the Church has continued in an unbroken succession for more than 2,000 years. The Eucharist and the historic continuity of the Church, among other truths, may strengthen your desire to know more about the Catholic faith.



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### ✝ THE SEARCH FOR FAMILY UNITY

In marriages of a Catholic and a non-Catholic, many couples find themselves wrestling with questions and concerns about moral values, going



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to church, maintaining religious traditions, and raising children in a faith tradition. It's not unusual for a non-Catholic to think about becoming a Catholic, like his or her spouse, as a means of uniting the family. Many find that as they discover more about the Catholic faith, their initial desire based on family unity

becomes a deep, personal desire to enter into the Catholic community as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

### Following Christ

The decision to embrace Catholicism entails more than adopting a set of beliefs or following certain practices. It is more than joining an organization. Entering the Catholic Church opens us to new spiritual insights and a new understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

Becoming Catholic may involve a transformation from having "no belief" to suddenly discovering what it means to be a Christian. It may be a reawakening of belief. Or, for someone already committed to Christ, it may mean moving to a different dimension of belief.

Embracing Catholicism is not an event with a defined beginning or ending. Catholics believe conversion is an ongoing process that continues throughout a person's life. Conversion sets us on a new spiritual path that leads to new encounters with Christ at different points along the journey. Catholics continually discover the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, in Scripture, in prayer, in the community of believers, and in outreach to those in need. All of these encounters with Christ bring us into closer union with God.



AGNUS IMAGES

## Deciding to Find Out More

Catholic parishes offer inquiry sessions that allow seekers to examine the Catholic faith more closely. During these sessions participants ask questions, explore Catholic teachings, and discover what it means to be a Catholic Christian. These sessions are designed to offer accurate information and clarify any misconceptions about the Catholic Church — with no strings attached.

If participants feel the desire to become Catholic, they may move into a deeper level of faith formation that focuses on prayer, sharing, community and reflection, called the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA).

### RCIA: The Process for Becoming Catholic

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (also called the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults) is a series of steps (formal rites) conducted in the context of learning about the faith and spiritual formation, through which a person is fully incorporated in the Body of Christ, the Church.

### RCIA STEPS

- The **Precatechumenate**, or period of inquiry, welcomes newcomers to ask questions and share their stories as they begin to learn more about the Church.
- The **Catechumenate** is a time of serious and dedicated formation, often in a group setting with other newcomers to the Catholic faith.
- The **Period of Purification and Enlightenment**, which coincides with Lent, is a period of continued instruction coupled with more intensive preparation and prayer. This period culminates with the Sacraments of Initiation (baptism, confirmation, holy Eucharist), bringing the candidates and catechumens into the full communion of the Catholic Church, usually at the Easter Vigil. (A candidate is a baptized Christian; a catechumen is an unbaptized candidate.)
- **Mystagogy** is the time after the newly initiated have been fully received into the Church; it lasts from Easter to Pentecost. All of these stages are marked by distinct liturgical rites.