

May 2026

Dear Inquirers,

Thank you for your interest in the OCIA (Order of Christian Initiation of Adults) at St. Paul the Apostle Church. OCIA is the process established by the universal Church for individuals to become Catholic through receiving the Sacraments of Initiation – Baptism, Confirmation, and the Holy Eucharist.

Think of OCIA as a spiritual journey, through which you will build a deepening relationship with Jesus and the Church he founded. This journey will take you through distinct phases during OCIA, helping you receive the truths of the faith, engage with the parish community in meaningful ways, and develop commitment to the liturgical and moral life of the Catholic faith. These all contribute to your spiritual “formation.”

The time it takes to complete the OCIA process depends on you. It may take one year or multiple years, depending on your needs and your readiness. When a child is baptized, the Church expects that the child will be gradually initiated into the life of faith by his or her parents, godparents, and parish community. When an adult or child enters the Church, OCIA is the pathway way to “full initiation into the Church.”

The following pages share important information about the OCIA process, baptisms, marriages, godparents, and sponsors. Please read these sections carefully. If you have concerns or questions, please contact me immediately. Left unaddressed, a matter could jeopardize your initiation into the Church.

This year, OCIA sessions begin on Sunday, August 30, 2026 and end on Sunday, May 2, 2027. We meet from 11:30 am to 1:00 pm in the Klinger Center (the school gym).

Through prayer, study, and conversation, we hope your journey will bring you to the fullness of the Catholic faith. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me (sosborne@stpacc.org).

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "R. Scott Osborne". The signature is cursive and stylized.

R. Scott Osborne
OCIA Coordinator

WHAT IS OCIA?

OCIA stands for the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults, the process by which an adult (including a child age seven and older) is initiated into the Catholic Church through the reception of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist. Through this process, the adult is formed in the faith, with the local parish community serving as teachers and models of the faith.

OCIA has been around since the early Church as the process by which the Church prepared un-baptized adults to be received into the Church. In the early centuries of Christianity, OCIA process was an intense study, prayer, and conversion period, often lasting up to three years. During the process, a sponsor would testify to the community about the individual's conversion, authenticity, and genuine readiness.

The Second Vatican Council restored and revamped the initiation process but, at the same time, retained the spirit of the communal participation of the whole Church. In keeping with the original practices of preparation, the elements of study, prayer, community, and discernment remain integral. However, persons may enter the Church in a shorter timeframe based on his/her needs. While there are standards and measures to discern your spiritual disposition at various points throughout the process and, consequently, how long you may be in each phase, there is no absolute schedule for the time it takes to complete the OCIA process.

The decision to be baptized, to become Catholic, or to complete initiation, must be the free will of each person. The Catholic Church does not use coercion, guilt, or any forms of manipulation to influence this decision.

Regardless of a person's age or circumstances, the Church is tasked with the duties, rights, and responsibilities to ensure that everyone 1) meets the requirements set out by the Code of Canon Law, and 2) publicly demonstrates the desire, readiness, and lifestyle that reflects acceptance and understanding of the Gospel and what it means to become a member of the Catholic Church.

OCIA is comprised of four periods and numerous rites. These follow the experiences of conversion and initiation into the Christian faith.

Inquiry is the first period in which individuals first experience the hearing of God's Word and become aware of God's presence, love, and work in their lives. One begins to know who God is. This is the phase in which the first stirrings of faith in Jesus Christ begin. For one already baptized, it is a reawakening of that awareness, the beginning of renewal, and the first intentional integration into the community of believers. The ritual that concludes this first period is the Rite of Acceptance (for unbaptized) and the Rite of Welcoming (for baptized). These rites are for those who have indicated and given evidence of conversion and the desire to follow Christ through the Catholic Church.

Catechumenate is the “apprenticeship” period of Christian discipleship – a time of training in the Christian life. This is accomplished through formal instruction in our faith’s core teachings and beliefs (doctrines) and is experienced through liturgy, service, and parish community life. This approach aims for a thorough integration of the faith into each individual’s life. The Rite of Election is the ritual that concludes this period. This rite is for the unbaptized who have given clear evidence of acquaintance and integration of the core teachings and beliefs and the desire to accept baptism. The Call to Continuing Conversion is the ritual for the baptized who also demonstrate acquaintance and integration of the core teachings and beliefs and desire to complete their initiation to come into full communion with the Catholic Church.

Enlightenment is the period, indicated by its name, that points to an intense, inward reflection and discernment. In this phase, the candidate seeks to be purified in their intentions to follow Christ more fully, to recognize any sinful attachments or attitudes that still separate or diminish their relationship with Christ, and to receive the light they need to follow him more authentically.

With Mystagogia, the final period, it is said that all the baptized faithful are continuing this phase because we are still reflecting on the story of Christ and still experiencing the conversion from our Christian initiation, regardless of when it occurred. The Mystagogia occurs strictly for the neophytes (newly baptized) and newly professed members between Easter and Pentecost. The Mystagogia period is like the story of the walk along the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). The disciples were so excited and filled with wonder telling the story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection that they did not recognize it was Christ to whom they were speaking until the breaking of the bread. He helped them understand his story in relation to the Scriptures and all they had experienced. It is a time of reflection, celebration, and active participation in the life and mission of the Church.

BEGINNING THE OCIA PROCESS

How do you know if or when it’s time to begin OCIA? There is no perfect answer. Each person must discern the level of desire they feel and determine what their schedule can handle. As one progresses through the OCIA process, each phase calls for a more intense commitment, so one may need to go slower in one phase or another due to scheduling issues. We do not put an expiration date on this process or predetermine a date for Initiation or Profession of Faith.

Un-baptized: Have you felt a stirring or sense of something special moving your life? Have you wondered about the joy or peace you’ve witnessed in friends or family who practice their Christian faith? Are you tired of the mixed information that well-meaning people give about who Jesus is, and you want to know for yourself? Do you desire a life of purpose, blessing, and joy for yourself?

Baptized-only Catholic: Have you felt a calling to begin living your faith more deeply? Is the desire to know your faith and have your life changed by it becoming more persistent? Are you longing to experience the joy of the sacraments, Mass, and belonging to a Catholic faith community?

Baptized non-Catholic Christian: Have you had an experience with the Catholic Church, either through a person or event that has touched you? Are you interested in learning what Catholics believe and how they live their faith daily? Are you attracted to Catholic worship or teaching and desire to become part of this Church? Have you been attending Mass for some time but never been invited to become Catholic?

BAPTISM

Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through baptism, we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ's mystical body, are incorporated into the Church, and made sharers in her mission: "Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water and in the word" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1213).

The Catholic Church teaches and professes one baptism for the remission of sin. To be valid, baptism must include the words: "[N.], I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," with three separate pourings of water (or immersions) at each name of the persons of the Holy Trinity.

Other Christian churches, such as the Orthodox and mainline Protestant churches, use the same Trinitarian formula with water for baptism as the Catholic Church. Therefore, once verified, the Catholic Church accepts those baptisms as valid. However, we must be morally certain that such a baptism occurred and will request documentation.

The Catholic Church does not "re-baptize" a person already validly baptized. A valid baptism may only occur once in a person's life because of the indelible spiritual mark or character imprinted on the person's soul. This mark cannot be removed, repeated, or forgotten. It consecrates the baptized person for Christian worship. Therefore, we will only baptize a person if it is determined that they were either 1) never baptized or 2) were baptized using a formula not recognized by the Church.

MARITAL STATUS

A married person wishing to be initiated into the Church must be in, what the Church calls, a "valid marriage." To ensure you can move forward to receive the sacraments of initiation without any impediments, we will ask some questions to explore your marital history during the OCIA intake process. Complete honesty is

essential during this process to ensure that your sacramental life, present or future, begins on the right track. Depending on your status, you may be asked to meet with Dr. Laurie Navin (Coordinator of Pastoral Ministry) who will review your marital status with you and advise as to the next steps involved.

For those who are currently married, we will inquire about your marriage at the time your vows were made and any previous marriages. This includes marriages witnessed by non-Catholic ministers or civil authorities. In some cases, your current marriage may need to be validated in the Church prior to beginning OCIA. Dr. Navin will discuss the next steps in this process with you, if applicable.

If you or your spouse have one or more prior marriages, each prior marriage must be reviewed to determine if an annulment is indicated. Dr. Navin will work with you following your OCIA intake meeting to determine this and explain the process specific to your situation. Once assessed, the parish will continue working with you to determine what steps are needed before beginning OCIA. This important step assures that you are free from any impediments when beginning OCIA, and free to receive the sacraments of initiation.

For those who are engaged and seeking to be received into the Church, the parish will review your marital histories, if any exist, as well as your current plans to marry.

If you are divorced with one or more prior marriages, your status at the time your vows were made will be reviewed to determine if an annulment is indicated.

If an annulment is indicated, Dr. Navin will explain this process and the typical timeline involved, as some processes can take 1-2 years to complete. It is important to note that annulments are not guaranteed, as the Tribunal of Columbus makes a final determination about these cases. Please know it is not the intention of the Church to cause undue worry or burden in these situations, but to ensure the road to full initiation is clear of any impediments and provide peace of mind when preparing to be received into the Church.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

A baptized, non-Catholic will need to provide a copy of proof of their baptism.

A person *baptized in the Catholic Church* must provide a new baptism certificate from the parish where they were baptized, and this certificate must be dated within six months of the parish office receiving it.

An *unbaptized person* must produce a copy of their birth certificate/adoption decree with the parents' names on either document.

SPONSOR/GODPARENT

Every adult who goes through OCIA will have a sponsor. Children age seven through sixteen, will have either a godparent (if they go through our OCIA Adapted for Children) or a sponsor (if they go through adult OCIA), or both. Everyone is invited to nominate a person to be their sponsor. If you do not have someone you wish to sponsor you (most do not), then we will match you with someone who will be your sponsor, men with men, women with women. See Appendix A for more information about sponsors and godparents.

ACCEPTANCE INTO OCIA and EXPECTATIONS FOR INITIATION

Not every person who applies to OCIA is accepted and not every person who begins the OCIA process is received into the Church.

Acceptance into OCIA can be declined or delayed for reasons such as not being in a valid marriage or requiring an annulment. Initiation into the Church can be delayed due to several possible reasons, including excessive absences, the decision to hold off or discontinue, or unresolved marital issues. Some may be received into the Church later, and others not.

There is no expectation that any inquirer will choose to be initiated into the Church. This is a decision that must be made with absolute freedom. Sponsors and godparents are to provide the encouragement and support that you need to freely choose what you believe God is asking of you regardless of where the decision takes you. We are here to support you in the discernment process by providing the truth of our faith, the reality of what it means to be Catholic, praying for and with you, and welcoming you to be with us regardless of the outcome.

Appendix A

SPONSOR/GODPARENT

The ideal sponsor/godparent is mature in their faith and active in the parish to connect their candidate or catechumen to the life of the parish. Those interested in becoming an OCIA sponsor/godparent must (cf. Canon 893):

- Be at least 16 years old.
- Be fully initiated in the Catholic Church.
- Not be the parent, guardian, or spouse of the intended participant.
- Be living a life of faith in harmony with Catholic Church teachings.
- If married, must be validly married according to the laws of the Catholic Church.
- If unmarried, must not be cohabitating with a partner.
- Have nothing in their past church or personal work that would be an impediment to serving.

All sponsors/godparents, including St. Paul parishioners, will complete a statement indicating they are aware of and meet the requirements, and are active parishioners in good standing. This form becomes part of the Church record. The role of the sponsor/godparent is to both support and witness the person's conversion and readiness to receive the sacraments. This is accomplished by attending the OCIA sessions, rites, and events with the inquirer while offering encouragement, listening, praying, and being an excellent Christian example outside the Church.

The sponsor/godparent is the connection to the parish. Therefore, his/her participation in parish life is essential. The sponsor/godparent introduces the inquirer to fellow parishioners, invites them to parish events, and meets with the candidate for one-on-one support.

It is common for inquirers to experience periods of uncertainty throughout the process. They may be challenged in their beliefs or moral attitudes by the new information they are receiving. The sponsor/godparent is there to encourage them to learn more and to pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance.

To this end, OCIA sessions are designed with the inquirer's needs as the priority, to help them in seeking information, and in discerning if God is calling them to live as Catholics. Therefore, for sponsors and godparents, incessant talking, preaching, "over-sharing," and dominating small group discussions is inappropriate. Quiet listening and time-sensitive sharing is the key.

The other aspect of a support role is recognizing and identifying the rich diversity of spirituality in the Church. This means encouraging the inquirer to investigate how Catholics worship, pray, learn, and enrich their faith.