

OCIA Sponsor Handbook for 2026-27

June 2026

“OCIA is what we do at St. Paul; it is not just a program.” – Fr. Wilson

The Order of Christian Initiation of Adults

The Order of Christian Initiation of Adults is a gradual process, aimed at welcoming adults into our Catholic family through reflection on the experiences of their lives, the message of Sacred Scripture, and the teachings and doctrines of the Catholic Church. It is a process focused on prayer, study, reflection, and discipleship. We focus on the spiritual formation of catechumens and candidates to help them grow in their faith and in their relationship with Jesus Christ. In addition to catechesis (knowledge imparted through teaching), we encourage participation in the parish community through personalized accompaniment, a primary responsibility of their sponsors.

The Important Role of Sponsors and Godparents

The role of the sponsor is to both support and witness the conversion and readiness of the person they sponsor (the **“participant”**) to receive the sacraments. This is accomplished by attending OCIA sessions, rites, and events with the participant while offering encouragement, listening, praying, and being an excellent Christian example in the way they live.

The sponsor may be the participant’s primary connection to the parish. Therefore, helping to facilitate the participant’s participation in parish life is essential. The sponsor introduces the participant to fellow parishioners, invites them to experience parish life, and talks and/or meets with them for one-on-one support.

It is common for participants to have periods of uncertainty throughout their spiritual formation process. They may be challenged in their beliefs or moral attitudes by the new information they are receiving. As a sponsor, you are there to encourage them, urge them to keep learning, and pray for the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

OCIA sessions are designed with the participant’s needs as the priority – to help them in seeking information and discerning how God is calling them to live as Catholics. Therefore, sponsors are expected to avoid nonstop talking, “preaching,” “over-sharing,” or dominating table discussions or one-on-one conversations. Thoughtful listening and time-sensitive sharing is the key.

The other aspect of your support role is recognizing and identifying the rich diversity of spirituality in the Church that will be relatable to the person(s) you sponsor. You are in a great position to help your participant gain exposure to aspects of the Catholic faith that will resonate with their passions, interests, and inclinations based on what you are continually learning about them. Your ever-growing relationship will inform your ability to guide them as they investigate how Catholics worship, pray, learn, and enrich their faith.

Not every person who begins the OCIA process is received into the Church. This is due to several possible reasons, including excessive absences, the decision to hold off or quit, or unresolved marital issues. Some may be received into the Church later, and others not. There is no expectation that any participant will choose to be initiated into the Church. This is a decision that must be made with absolute freedom.

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Therefore, as a sponsor, you are to provide the encouragement and support that your participant needs to freely choose what they believe God is asking of them, regardless of where the decision takes them. We are all here to support them in the discernment process by providing the truth of our faith, the reality of what it means to be Catholic, praying for and with them, and welcoming them to be with us regardless of the outcome.

A sponsor to someone who is received into the Church or completes their initiation is connected to this person throughout their life. Your role continues as one of encouragement and example though your level of interaction may be much less than during OCIA. Once they become a neophyte (newly initiated Catholic), your participant may need to be re-introduced to fellow parishioners and ministry leaders and re-invited to learn about the different opportunities in the parish. Staying in touch throughout the first year is expected; this is a year of many firsts and one that the neophyte will need to feel welcomed. A special relationship will have taken place by this time; it is one to celebrate.

Sponsor Requirements

The ideal sponsor is mature in their faith and active in the parish, enabling them to connect their candidate or catechumen to the life of the parish. Those interested in becoming an OCIA sponsor must:

- 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.

To serve as a sponsor, one must 1) complete the *OCIA Sponsor Application* form on the St. Paul website, 2) complete an interview, 3) complete the sponsor training, 4) certify that they meet all *Sponsor Requirements* and accept all *Sponsor Responsibilities* described in this handbook (Appendix A).

Upon approval by the parish, notification will be emailed to the applicant informing them of their approval. All sponsors, including St. Paul parishioners, will complete a statement indicating they are aware of and meet the requirements, and attest that they are active parishioners in good standing. This form will become part of the Church record.

Sponsors who are not St. Paul parishioners will also complete a *Certificate to Serve as a Godparent or Sponsor* with their pastor's signature and parish seal affixed.

Sponsor Responsibilities

- 1) Help the participant share in and live out their faith. "The sponsor is to take care that the confirmed person behaves as a true witness of Christ and faithfully fulfills the obligations inherent in this sacrament (*confirmation*).” (cf. Canon 892)
- 2) Attend weekly OCIA sessions and other designated events. It is recognized that sessions will be missed periodically, but the spirit of the sponsor's commitment is to

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attend as often as possible. Please let the person(s) you sponsor know when you cannot attend.

- a) Accompany your unbaptized participant(s) during 10 am Masses for the Rite of Welcoming, Rite of Election, and the three Scrutinies
 - b) Accompany the person(s) you sponsor at the Easter Vigil rehearsal on Holy Saturday.
 - c) Accompany the person(s) you sponsor at the Easter Vigil.
- 3) Attend sponsor meetings/training sessions.
 - 4) Maintain at least biweekly contact with the person(s) you sponsor
 - a) Determine the preferred means by which you will communicate with each other and use that means when you reach out to them.
 - 5) Help get answers to your participant's questions. You are not expected to know answers to every question they may raise, but you should assist them in getting the answers. This may entail referrals (to people or resources) or hand-offs.
 - 6) Help your participant experience the Church and the parish community.
 - a) When you discern the timing is right, invite/bring the person(s) you sponsor to Mass, ministry, community, and volunteer events in which you participate at *least once*. Affirm them whenever they decline.
 - 7) Conduct discernment interviews with the person(s) you sponsor using questionnaire templates which will be provided. Provide written interview notes for the OCIA coordinator.
 - a) Fall interviews prior to the Rites of Acceptance/Welcoming.
 - b) Winter interviews prior to the Rite of Election.
 - 8) Assure that the person(s) you sponsor turns in required documentation or information (e.g., baptism certificate, choosing a confirmation name) within requested timeframes.
 - 9) Keep up-to-date with OCIA Flocknotes and remind the person(s) you sponsor about important items such as deadlines, sign-ups, and changes.

Miscellaneous Notes

- 1) Spouses and parents are welcome to be "Support Partners" and participate in all aspects of OCIA with their loved ones.
 - 2) Guests are always welcome to attend OCIA sessions.
 - 3) "Auditors" (parishioners; fully initiated Catholics) will be invited attend OCIA sessions – they are a pipeline for new sponsors and team members.
 - 4) Table Leaders will be assigned and will have responsibility for moderating table discussions and helping to ensure that take-aways are aligned with Church teaching.
 - a) Table Leaders will be identified, and their responsibilities will be made known to all.
 - b) Table Leaders are not expected to know the authoritative Catholic teaching on all topics, but when they discern that a questionable statement has gone unchallenged or uncorrected, they will take responsibility to get resolution before the session adjourns.
 - 5) Childcare
 - a) Childcare will be available during all weekly OCIA sessions.
 - b) Sarah Price serves as the OCIA Childcare Coordinator.
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- c) Childcare *may* be provided for events and extracurricular activities, subject to the availability of providers.
- 6) Optional extracurricular opportunities will be offered.
 - a) Learn and experience common devotions/practices (what, how, when, where), e.g.,
 - i) Eucharistic adoration/Holy Hour
 - ii) The Rosary
 - iii) The Divine Mercy Chaplet
 - iv) Stations of the Cross
 - v) Office of Readings
 - vi) Lectio Divina
 - b) “Field trips”
 - i) Mass at the Cathedral, a shrine, e.g., the Basilica at Carey, OH, others TBD.

Important Events and Dates for the Coming Year (*subject to change*)

- First OCIA Session: Aug 30, 2026
- Rite of Acceptance/Welcoming (10 am Mass): Dec 6, 2026
- OCIA Retreat on The Holy Eucharist: Jan 30, 2027
- Ash Wednesday: Feb 10, 2027
- Rite of Sending (10 am Mass), Rite of Election (afternoon): First Sunday of Lent, Feb 14, 2027
- First Scrutiny (10 am Mass): Third Sunday of Lent, Feb 28, 2027
- Rite of Handing on the Creed (6:15 pm Mass): Mar 4, 2027
- Second Scrutiny (10 am Mass): Fourth Sunday of Lent, Mar 7, 2027
- Third Scrutiny (10 am Mass): Fifth Sunday of Lent, Mar 14, 2027
- Rite of Handing on the Lord’s Prayer (6:15 pm Mass): Mar 18, 2027
- Conditional Baptisms & First Confessions (1:30 pm): Palm Sunday, Mar 21, 2027
- Easter Vigil Rehearsal (11 am): Mar 27, 2027
- Easter Vigil (8 pm): Mar 27, 2027
- Last OCIA Session: May 2, 2027 – celebration and sacramental certificates provided

SPONSOR CERTIFICATION

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is (print) _____

I hereby attest that I meet all *Sponsor Requirements* and accept all *Sponsor Responsibilities* described in the St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church OCIA Sponsor Handbook.

Signature _____ Date _____