

The Preparation for Baptism, or Catechumenate

The pastoral welcome of persons discerning a call to Baptism is the solemn responsibility of the whole Christian community. *The Preparation for Baptism, or Catechumenate*, is a period of exploration of the Christian life in the context of a congregation. The process is designed to pastorally accompany a person who is deciding whether they are called into Christ's Body the Church.

This process is appropriate for adults and older children who can answer for themselves. A similar process, designed for the parents of children to be baptized, is found on page 141. Another process of preparation for Confirmation, Reception, or other reaffirmations of the Baptismal Covenant is found on page 147.

Throughout the process, seekers meet regularly with their catechists and sponsors to reflect upon their experience in the light of Scripture, exploring four central dimensions of the Church's life: the interpretation of Scripture, communal worship, personal prayer, and service to the poor and oppressed. The preparation of persons for Baptism is a responsibility of the bishop, shared with the local clergy, lay catechists, and sponsors.

Each catechetical session consists of reflection on the readings of the Sunday Eucharistic Lectionary and other suitable resources. Preparation for Baptism, or the Catechumenate, should not be confused with reading or memorizing the Catechism found in The Book of Common Prayer.

This process of preparation is ongoing in the congregation, and persons may enter it at any time. The final period of preparation, however, begins approximately six weeks prior to the Baptism, for example, on the First Sunday in Lent for Baptism at Easter.

Step One: Inquiry.

This is the time when unbaptized persons begin to explore what it means to become part of the Christian household. This exploration can occur in any number of settings and contexts, and congregational leaders are encouraged to look for creative ways to share the Gospel in their own communities, by their own acts of public ministry and witness.

Step Two: Exploration, or the Catechumenate

When a person decides to explore and experience the Christian life with others in a more structured manner, the rite of Admission of Catechumens (*page 127 below*) is used. Seekers are presented to the congregation by their sponsors and welcomed into the life of the parish. This may be done on any Sunday of the year. The catechumens then meet regularly with their sponsors and catechists to explore the interpretation of Scripture, communal worship, personal prayer, and service to the poor and oppressed.

Step Three: Preparation for Baptism

When the seekers, together with their sponsors and catechists, express a desire for Baptism, the rite of Enrollment of Candidates for Baptism (*page 131 below*) is celebrated. This begins a final period during which the candidates for baptism engage in an intense time of preparation. During this final preparation, the candidates identify and express the ways in which their lives have been affected or changed during the previous phases of the process, and consider the experience of Jesus' death and resurrection in their own lives. This rite is used approximately six weeks prior to the date of Baptism.

Step Four: Reflection on the Sacraments.

Following the Celebration of Holy Baptism, the new Christians continue to meet regularly to reflect upon the experience and meaning of Baptism and Eucharist. All the members of the congregation are invited to be part of these reflections. This period of reflection lasts about seven weeks, proportionate to the six weeks of intense pre-baptismal preparation.

Preparation of Adults for Holy Baptism: The Catechumenate

Admission of Catechumens

Before or after the Creed the Presider invites those to be admitted as catechumens to come forward with their sponsors.

*The Presider then addresses those to be admitted.
The question may be asked of everyone all at once, or to each person individually.*

What do you seek?

Answer Life in Christ. *(The seekers may expand on the answer in their own words.)*

The Presider then says,
Jesus said, “The first commandment is this: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is the only Lord. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.” Do you accept these commandments?

Answer I do.

Presider

Will you be regular in attending the public worship of God, and will you open your ears to hear the Word of God?

Answer I will, with God’s help.

Presider

Will you open your heart and mind to receive the Good News of Jesus Christ?

Answer I will, with God’s help.

The Presider then addresses the sponsors

Will you who sponsor these persons support them by prayer and example, and help them to grow in the knowledge and love of God?

Sponsors I will.

Those to be admitted kneel. The sponsors remain standing and place a hand upon the shoulder of the one they are sponsoring, while the Presider extends a hand toward them and says

May Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who has put the desire into your hearts to seek the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, grant you the power of the Holy Spirit to persevere in this intention and to grow in faith and understanding.

People Amen.

Each of those to be admitted is presented by name to the Presider, who, with the thumb, marks a cross on the forehead of each, saying

N., receive the sign of the Cross on your forehead and in your heart, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

People Amen.

The Sponsors also mark a cross on the foreheads of their catechumens. The catechumens and sponsors then return to their places.

The Liturgy continues with the Prayers of the People, in the course of which prayer is offered for the new catechumens by name.

During the Period of Preparation (the Catechumenate proper)

During the period of preparation the catechumens meet regularly with their catechist and sponsors. At the conclusion of each session, the catechumens pray for themselves and one another in silence or aloud. The catechist then says one or two of the following or some other suitable prayer, and lays a hand on the head of each catechumen in silence.

1 O God, the creator and savior of all, look lovingly on your sons and daughters whom you call. Cleanse their hearts and guard them as they prepare to receive your Sacraments that, led by your Holy Spirit, they may be united with your Son, and enter into the inheritance of your people, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

2 O God of truth, beauty, and goodness, we give you thanks that from the beginning you have revealed yourself in your creation; and that in every nation, culture, and language there have been those who, seeing your works, have worshiped you and sought to do your will. Accept our prayers for N. and N. whom you have called to know and love you as you have been revealed in Jesus Christ, and bring them with joy to new birth in the waters of Baptism; through the same Jesus Christ our Redeemer. *Amen.*

3 O God of righteousness and truth, you proclaimed your victory over the forces of deceit and sin by the coming of your Son, Jesus: Give to N. and N. a growing understanding of your truth; and grant that, being born to new life in the waters of Baptism, they may join us in worshipping you in righteousness and truth; through the same Jesus Christ our Savior. *Amen.*

4 O God, in your pity you looked upon a fallen world, and sent your Beloved Son among us to vanquish the powers of wickedness. Deliver N. and N. from bondage to sin and evil. Purify their desires and thoughts with the light of your Holy Spirit. Nourish them with your holy Word, strengthen them in faith, and confirm them in good works; through Jesus Christ our Deliverer. *Amen.*

5 Look down in mercy, O God, upon these catechumens now being immersed in your holy Word. Open their ears to hear and their hearts to answer in gladness and joy. Bring to their minds their past sins, committed

against you and against their neighbors, that they may truly repent of them. In your mercy preserve them in their resolve to seek your kingdom and your righteousness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

6 Lord Jesus Christ, loving Redeemer of all, we pray to you for these catechumens who seek to serve you, the one true God. Send your light into their hearts, protect them from the power of the Evil One, heal in them the wounds of sin, and strengthen them against temptation. Give them a love of your commandments, and courage to live always by your Gospel, and so prepare them to receive your Spirit; you who live and reign for ever and ever. *Amen.*

7 Most merciful God, behold and sustain these catechumens who seek to know you more fully: Free them from bondage to evil and deceit; that, coming in faith to the Sacrament of Baptism, they may commit themselves to you, receive the seal of the Holy Spirit, and share with us in the eternal priesthood of your Son, Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

8 O God of light and life, by the death and resurrection of your Christ you have cast out hatred and deceit, and poured upon the human family the light of truth and love: Look upon these catechumens whom you have called to enter your covenant, free them from the powers of darkness, and number them among the children of promise; through Jesus Christ, our Friend and Brother. *Amen.*

9 Stir up, O God, the wills of these catechumens, and assist them by your grace, that they may bring forth plenteously the fruit of good works, and receive from you a rich reward; through Jesus Christ our Savior. *Amen.*

Enrollment of Candidates for Baptism

The large book in which the names of the candidates for Baptism are to be written is placed where it can easily be seen and used. Before or after the Creed, the catechumens to be enrolled are invited to come forward with their sponsors.

A Catechist or other lay representative of the congregation presents them to the bishop or priest.

I present to you N.N., N.N. (etc.) who have been strengthened by the Word of God and supported by the example and prayers of this congregation, and I ask that they be enrolled as candidates for Holy Baptism.

The Presider asks the sponsors

Have they been regular in attending the public worship of God and in hearing and pondering the Word of God?

Sponsors They have. (He/she has.)

Presider Have they opened themselves in heart and mind to discover and follow the call of Christ in their daily life?

Sponsors They have (He/she has.)

The Presider asks the sponsors and congregation

With God as your witness, do you desire these catechumens to be enrolled as candidates for Holy Baptism?

Answer We do.

The Presider addresses the catechumens individually.

Do you desire to be baptized?

Catechumen I do.

After all have been queried, the Presider then says,

In the Name of God, and with the consent of this congregation, we welcome you as candidates for Holy Baptism. You are now invited to sign your name in this book, so that you may be formally enrolled.

The candidates then publicly write their names in the book; or, if necessary, someone else may write the names. Each name is said aloud at the time of writing.

If the Great Litany has not preceded the Eucharist, the following litany may serve as the Prayers of the People, or some other form of the Prayers of the People (as described on BCP 383) may be used. If the Great Litany has preceded the Eucharist, the following litany is used here, omitting the indicated petitions.

The candidates remain together at the front of the church while the Deacon, or other person appointed, leads the prayers:

Let us pray for these candidates, and all those preparing for Holy Baptism, saying, "Guide us in your grace."

For N. and N., that they may remember this day, and remain for ever grateful for this blessing,
we pray to you, O Christ.
Guide us in your grace

That they may join us in works of justice, mercy, and self-denial, we pray to you, O Christ.
Guide us in your grace

For their catechists, that they may make known to them the riches of the Word of God,
we pray to you, O Christ.
Guide us in your grace

For their sponsor(s), that in their lives they may show to these candidates a pattern of life in accordance with the Gospel,
we pray to you, O Christ.
Guide us in your grace

For their families and friends, that they may place no obstacles in the way of these candidates, but rather assist them to follow the promptings of the Spirit,
we pray to you, O Christ.
Guide us in your grace

For this congregation, that [during this Lenten season] we may abound in love and persevere in prayer,
we pray to you, O Christ.

Guide us in your grace

******For our Bishop, and for all the clergy and people, we pray to you, O Christ.

Guide us in your grace

******For our President, for the leaders of the nations, and for all in authority, we pray to you, O Christ.

Guide us in your grace

******For the sick and the sorrowful, and for those in any need or trouble, we pray to you, O Christ.

Guide us in your grace

******For _____, we pray to you, O Christ.

Guide us in your grace

******For all who have died in the hope of the resurrection, and for all the departed,
we pray to you, O Christ.

Guide us in your grace

******In the communion of [_____ and of all the] saints, let us commend ourselves, and one another, and all our life, to Christ our God.

Both now and forever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Silence

The Presider says the following prayer with hands extended over the candidates
Gracious and merciful Jesus, protector of all who come to you, and the life of those who trust in you: We call upon you for N., N., and N. who desire the grace of spiritual rebirth in the sacrament of Holy Baptism. Welcome them, O Christ, as you promised when you said, "Ask, and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to

you," that they may receive the blessing of your spiritual washing, experience the joy of your abundant grace, and enter into that eternal life which you have promised; for you have overcome the powers of darkness, and with the Father and the Holy Spirit you live and reign, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

The candidates then return to their places and the Liturgy continues with the Confession of Sin or with the Peace.

During The Period of Final Preparation

On the Sundays preceding their baptism, the candidates attend public worship with their sponsors, and both the candidates and sponsors are prayed for by name in the Prayers of the People. (When Eucharistic Prayer D is used, however, it is appropriate that the names be inserted at the place provided in that prayer.)

In addition, the following prayers and blessings may be used immediately before the Prayers of the People, especially on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays in Lent. When these prayers are used, the candidates and sponsors are called forward. The candidates kneel or bow their heads. The sponsors each place a hand upon the shoulder of their candidate.

The Presider then calls the people to prayer in these or similar words
Dear friends, let us pray in silence for these candidates who are preparing to receive the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Baptism.

All pray in silence.

The Presider says one of the following prayers:

God our creator, at the beginning of all things you called forth light to dispel the darkness that lay upon the face of the deep: Deliver these your servants from the powers of evil and enlighten them with the light of your goodness, that with open eyes and glad hearts they may worship you and serve you, now and for ever; through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. *Amen.*

or this

O Jesus Christ, true Light who enlightens the world: Shine, we pray, in the hearts of these candidates, that they may clearly see the way that leads to life eternal, and may follow it without stumbling; for you O Christ, are the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; and you live and reign for ever and ever. *Amen.*

or this

Come, Holy Spirit, come; come as the wind and cleanse; come as the fire and burn; come from the four winds and turn the hearts and minds of these your servants, to their great good and to your great glory; who with the Father and the Son are one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

The Presider lays a hand on the head of each candidate in silence. A significant period of silence is kept.

The Presider then adds one of the following blessings:

May Almighty God bestow upon you all grace and mercy, and give you an understanding of the way of liberation and healing; through Christ our Redeemer. *Amen.*

or this

May Almighty God guide your steps in the way of truth, and cause you to walk in the paths of peace and love; through Christ our Deliverer. *Amen.*

or this

May Almighty God nourish you with the knowledge and wisdom of the catholic faith, and grant you to persevere in every good work; through Christ our Savior. *Amen.*

The candidates and sponsors return to their places and the Liturgy continues.

Additional Directions

1. When there are catechumens who are candidates for baptism at the Great Vigil of Easter, it is appropriate in any year with the consent of the Bishop to use the Sunday lectionary for Year A during Lent and the Great Fifty Days of Easter.

2. If it is the custom of the parish to send the catechumens to reflect upon the readings following the Sermon, it is appropriate that the Presider pronounce a blessing over them, and commission them to reflect on the Word they have received. Catechumens should be accompanied by their sponsors and catechists for the time of reflection.

If it is the custom of the parish that the catechumens remain in the Assembly for the Holy Communion, they (and their sponsors and catechists) return to their places, and the liturgy continues with the Creed.

If catechumens remain in the Assembly throughout the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist, instead of receiving the Bread and Wine of Holy Communion, it is appropriate that they receive a blessing anticipating their baptism, with the laying on of hands by the Presider (and their sponsor and catechists.) This may be done in either of two ways.

(1) At the Words of Invitation, the Presider declares "The Gifts of God for the People of God" immediately followed by the words "Let the catechumens approach." The catechumens, with their sponsors and catechists, approach the altar, and the Presider (and sponsors and catechists) lay hands on the catechumens while the Presider prays as follows, or with other suitable words. The catechumens then return to their places in the assembly.

OR

(2) During the distribution of communion, the candidates come forward from their places (with their sponsors and catechists) according to parish custom. The Presider (and sponsors and catechists) lay hands on them and pray over them individually. Sponsors and catechists receive the Bread and Wine according to parish custom, and all return to their places in the assembly.

Blessing over the Catechumens/Candidates

May the Holy Spirit stir up in you a thirst for the waters of Baptism, a yearning for the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation, and a passion for the dominion of God in this world and in the world to come, through the Crucified and Risen one, Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

3. *It is appropriate that the Apostles' Creed be given to the Candidates for Baptism on the Third Sunday in Lent and the Lord's Prayer be given to them on the Fifth Sunday in Lent. (This may follow the Prayers for the candidates for Baptism on those Sundays. See page 134.)*

The Presentation of the Creed (Third Sunday in Lent)

The Apostles' Creed is given to the baptismal candidates since at their Baptism, candidates will recite the Apostles' Creed in the Baptismal Covenant.

Immediately after the Sermon, candidates and sponsors are called forward for (the Prayers for the Candidates for Baptism, and for) the Presentation of the Creed. The Candidates remain standing, as the sponsors each place a hand upon the shoulder of their candidate.

One of the catechists says

**Let the candidate(s) for Baptism now receive the Creed from the Church.
The People and Presider say the Apostles' Creed, all standing.**

The Presider concludes

**(Candidate(s), go in peace.) May Christ remain with you always. Amen.
Candidates and sponsors are dismissed, or return to their places in the congregation.**

The Presentation of the Lord's Prayer (Fifth Sunday in Lent)

When the candidates have been baptized and take part in their first celebration of the Eucharist, they will join the rest of the faithful in saying the Lord's Prayer.

Immediately after the Sermon, candidates and sponsors are called forward for (the Prayers for the Candidates for Baptism and for) the Presentation of the Lord's Prayer. (The Creed may be omitted on this day.) The Candidates remain standing, as the sponsors each place a hand upon the shoulder of their candidate.

One of the catechists says

Let the candidate(s) for Baptism now receive the Lord's Prayer from the Church.

Presider As our Savior Christ has taught us, we are bold to say/we
now pray,

People and Presider Our Father, who art in heaven/Our Father in heaven...

The Presider concludes

(Candidate(s), go in peace.) May Christ remain with you always. *Amen.*