

# Essential Formation for the Catechumenate

## Introduction

*“The catechumenate is a lengthy period during which catechumens receive pastoral instruction and practice appropriate disciplines; by the help of these their spiritual frame of mind, already manifested by their entrance, is brought to maturity. There are four ways by which this is achieved:*

- 1) Appropriate catechesis ... divided into steps and fully presented, suited to the liturgical year...*
- 2) Becoming familiar with the practice of Christian life... the newly converted set out on a spiritual journey, by means of which ... they pass from the old self to the new...*
- 3) They are assisted on their journey by Mother Church with suitable liturgical rites...*
- 4) Since the life of the Church is apostolic, catechumens too should learn to cooperate actively in evangelization.”* OCIA, #75

The following outline of “essential formation” is intended to provide a more in-depth description of what “pastoral instruction” and “appropriate disciplines” are necessary to prepare an unbaptized adult to receive the sacraments of initiation. There are two core principles upon which this draft of “essential formation” was built. First, **the aim was to capture what is “necessary” and “sufficient” intellectual formation** to prepare an individual to profess requisite faith at the Easter Vigil and be admitted to the sacraments. We welcome your input in helping us discern what is “necessary” intellectual formation prior to baptism, and alternatively, that which could be developed over time after baptism (life long “mystagogy”). Second, **the catechumenate is intended to be experienced as an “apprenticeship” in the Christian life** (OCIA #76). As a result, formation areas such as “spiritual formation” and “apostolic formation” should be “hands on” and “practical” not academic or lecture based. Though this document focuses exclusively on “what” essential formation belongs in the catechumenate, ample thought must be given to “how” this formation is provided to ensure it is *experienced* as an apprenticeship and *not* solely a lecture based academic exercise.

## Simplified Overview

### A. Doctrinal Catechesis – The Creed

- a. Creation
- b. God’s pursuit of humanity
- c. The Trinity
- d. Who is Jesus Christ
- e. The Paschal Mystery
- f. The Holy Spirit
- g. The Blessed Virgin Mary
- h. The Church
- i. The Final Judgment
- j. The Saints and Angels

### B. Doctrinal Catechesis – The Sacraments

- a. What is a sacrament? What is their origin? Why did God institute them?
- b. Sacraments of Initiation

- c. Baptism
- d. Confirmation
- e. Eucharist
- f. Sacraments at the Service of Communion and Mission
- g. Marriage
- h. Holy Orders
- i. Consecrated Life
- j. Sacraments of Healing
- k. Penance/Reconciliation
- l. Anointing of the Sick

### **C. Moral Teaching and Addressing the Secular Worldview**

- a. The Ten Commandments
- b. Addressing a secular worldview
- c. What does it mean to be human?
- d. Theology of the Body
- e. Ecumenism and Treatment of the New Age
- f. Catholic Social Teaching

### **D. Pastoral/Spiritual Formation**

- a. Beginning explanation of “What is prayer?” and “How to pray?”
- b. Introduction on how to use the Bible
- c. How to hear God’s voice
- d. The Holy Spirit
- e. Communal Prayer
- f. Basic instruction on the intercession of the saints
- g. Formation in how to “pray the Mass”
- h. Introduction to popular devotions
- i. Introduction to fasting
- j. Introduction to forgiveness
- k. Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy

### **E. Liturgical Catechesis**

- a. Explanation and experience of the Church’s liturgical seasons as they happen during the year
- b. Celebrations of the Word
- c. Suitable liturgical rites
- d. Exposure to the Liturgy of the Word within the context of the Sunday Mass
- e. Explanation of the meaning, structure, and script of the Rite of Election

### **F. Apostolic Formation**

- a. The universal call to mission
- b. Witnessing to the faith in words
- c. Witnessing to the faith in deeds

# Doctrinal Catechesis

The purpose of doctrinal catechesis is to *train* and *apprentice* catechumens in the Christian way of life. Just as *perfect* faith and maturity are not required for baptism (see CCC 1253), perfect doctrinal understanding is not required for the reception of the sacraments of initiation or for catechumens to become disciples of Christ. Doctrinal catechesis during the Catechumenate is meant to be *initial* and gradually develop throughout the catechumen's life as a Catholic. The goal is to impart to each catechumen a beginning understanding of the faith for the purpose of a life of discipleship, not to make of them amateur theologians.

## A. The Creed:

- **Creation**
  - We are created in the image and likeness of God
  - The creation narrative and the account of the Fall
  - Revisit the first two points of the kerygma:
    - God created us out of love for a personal relationship with Him
    - This relationship was broken through Original Sin, and is continuously harmed through our sins today
- **God's Pursuit of Humanity**
  - God has constantly been pursuing communion with humanity
  - Briefly go over the stories of Noah, Abraham, Moses (before and after freedom from Egyptian captivity), David, and Solomon with the intention of highlighting God's pursuit of man
  - Should be made aware of the Bible as divine revelation & divinely inspired by God
- **The Trinity**
  - Introduction of God as one nature, three persons
  - General explanation of the Son proceeding from the Father and the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son
  - Clarification that God is not in different "modes" or "parts" but exists fully in all three persons in a monotheistic sense
- **Who is Jesus Christ**
  - Explain that he is both fully man and fully God
  - An introduction to the life of Jesus' as recounted by the Gospels
- **The Paschal Mystery**
  - Revisit the third point of the kerygma:
    - By his cross, Jesus restores the relationship between humanity and God, providing "a bridge" to cross the gap created by our sins
  - The crucifixion, death, resurrection, and ascension narratives
    - What happened and the importance of why it matters today
- **The Holy Spirit**
  - Understanding the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives as an advocate
  - Understand the meaning of Pentecost Sunday
- **The Blessed Virgin Mary**
  - Introduction to the person of Mary. Her role in God's plan of salvation and our relationship with her (Jn 19).
  - A brief explanation of the four Marian Dogmas held by the Church and why they matter
  - Brief discussion on why the Church has deemed them "required belief"

- **The Church (One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic)**
  - The need for a hierarchical Church
  - Apostolic succession
  - The Church as “the Body of Christ”
  - Introduction to the five precepts of the Church and their importance
- **The Final Judgement**
  - Brief explanation of the difference between Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory
  - Emphasis on how holiness gets us to heaven
  - Explanation of the resurrection of the body
- **The Saints and The Angels**
  - Explanation of the meaning of “sainthood” and intercession (communion of saints)
  - An exploration of a few different saint stories
  - Guardian angels and the role of angels in general
  - A brief discussion on the reality of the spiritual realm

## B. The Sacraments

- **What is a sacrament? What is their origin? Why did God institute them?**
  - Difference between a covenant and a contract
  - The Sacraments and the Pascal Mystery
    - Connection to Christ life and the Liturgy
  - The effect of the Sacraments and the grace they impart
    - Transmission of Christ’s life into us
- **Sacraments of Initiation**
  - We are created for communion with God who is love and the sacraments of initiation bring us into the restored relationship offered to us through Christ (reminder of the connection to the kerygma)
  - Connection of these sacraments to the universal call to holiness and mission
  - Jesus as Priest, Prophet, and King; in receiving the sacraments of initiation (especially baptism) we are given a share in these “offices” of Jesus
- **Baptism**
  - Explanation of its connection with the life of Christ (ie: Jesus’ baptism, Jesus giving the great commission, etc)
  - Effects of the sacrament
    - Taking away original sin, personal sin, and all its punishment
    - Adoption into God’s family
      - Participation in the life of the Trinity
      - Indwelling of the Holy Spirit
- **Confirmation**
  - Explanation of its connection to the life of Christ (ie: descent of the Holy Spirit at Jesus’ baptism, Jesus sending the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, etc)
  - Effects of the sacrament

- Deepening of baptismal graces and a special outpouring of Holy Spirit
  - Gifts of the Holy Spirit
  - Special strength to witness to the Christian faith
- Why the practice of choosing a patron saint?
- **Eucharist**
  - Explanation of its connection to the life of Christ (ie: feeding of the multitudes, the Last Supper, the road to Emmaus, etc)
  - Effects of the sacrament
    - Increased union with Christ and his Church
    - Preserves and renews life of grace
    - Strengthens charity, etc.
  - How to properly receive the sacrament (both physical posture and spiritual disposition)
- **Sacraments at the Service of Communion and Mission**
  - Explanation of Christ's role as servant and our invitation to imitate him
  - Though all of us share the "universal" call to holiness and mission, Christ invites each of us to a "specific" mission – our "vocation"
- **Marriage**
  - Explanation of the difference between a "secular" view marriage and a sacramental view of marriage
  - Marriage is ordered towards both procreation/education of children and unity of spouses
  - Introduction into the four marks of married love: free, total, faithful, fruitful and their connection to Jesus' love for the Church.
- **Holy Orders**
  - Basic introduction to priesthood (ie: instituted by Jesus, act "in persona Christi", etc)
  - Introduction to the diaconate; modeled after "Christ the servant"
- **Consecrated life**
  - Although not a sacrament, consecrated life is a particular way of life and service in the Church and witness to the world
  - Introduction to the evangelical counsels
- **Sacraments of Healing**
  - Sin and its consequences
    - Mortal vs venial sin
    - God's infinite love and mercy
- **Penance/Reconciliation**
  - What is confession?
  - Effect of the sacrament
  - How to properly receive the sacrament (both the mechanics and spiritual disposition)
- **Anointing of the Sick**
  - What is the anointing of the sick?
  - Effect of the Sacrament
  - When the sacrament could be received

## C. Moral Teaching & Addressing the Secular Worldview

In order to truly impart the Christian life through apprenticeship, certain topics must be addressed to combat the colluded and skewed worldview of the secular 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is necessary to accompany the catechumen through the process of “renewing their mind” (Rom 12:2). These topics may be addressed in conjunction with the moral teaching of the Church, using the ten commandments as a guide and backbone.

- **The Ten Commandments**
  - General overview of the Ten Comandments, preferably presented alongside other relevant moral teachings in this list
  - Explanation of how to apply the commandments to every day life (ie: Thou shall not kill also applies to sins of anger, not just actual murder)
- **Addressing a Secular Worldview**
  - Man-centered, performance-based salvation, reliance on the self
  - Moral Therapeutic Deism
  - Hyper-individualism
  - Subjective truth and reinvention (Relativism)
    - With each of the above topics, introducing the “counter” Christian Worldview: the Gospel (the inverse of the secular worldview)
- **What Does it Mean to Be Human? (*Dignitas Infinita*)**
  - Church teaching on Transhumanism
  - Explanation of gender ideology through a Catholic lens
  - Church teaching on euthanasia and abortion
- **Theology of the Body (*Humanae Vitae*)**
  - The meaning and purpose of sex
  - Church teaching on contraception and IVF
- **Ecumenism and Treatment of the New Age (*Jesus Christ, the Bearer of the Water of Life*)**
  - How does the Catholic Church see other Judeo-Christian religions
  - Church teaching on the occult, new age practices like reiki and tarot, and paganism
- **Catholic Social Teaching—**
  - Political involvement as a Catholic
  - Basic introduction to the Social Doctrine of the Church

## D. Spiritual/"Pastoral" Formation

*"The catechumenate is a lengthy period during which catechumens receive pastoral instructions and practice appropriate disciplines; by the help of these their spiritual frame of mind, already manifested by their entrance, is brought to maturity...[by] becoming familia with the practice of the Christian life...they grow accustomed to praying more easily to God..." - OCIA #75*

It is important to understand that spiritual/pastoral formation is not meant to be primarily intellectual. Any catechetical instruction or teaching should be done with the intention of aiding catechumens in deepening their spiritual life and relationship with the Trinity in a concrete way. Therefore, the following topics of formation should be *transmitted* in a spirit of "apprenticeship", helping catechumens develop their spiritual life as they mature as disciples of Christ. It's possible, even likely, that a significant portion of this formation could happen outside the context of a classroom and through the help of a sponsor.

- **Beginning explanation of "What is prayer?" and "How to pray?"**
  - Prayer is "communion with God", "dialogue", etc
  - Exposure to different ways of praying, such as: imaginative prayer, lectio or visio divina, vocal prayer, praise and worship, etc.
- **Introduction on how to use the Bible**
  - Basic instruction on how to find chapter/verse, where to find the Gospels, etc
  - Explanation that the Church offers many resources to help us learn more about the context and content of the bible
  - Praying with scripture is a foundational spiritual practice, assist them in building the habit
- **How to Hear God's Voice**
  - Share God's desire to speak and commune with us, as well as how to hear God's voice in prayer through reading of Scripture, the use of the imagination, attentiveness to own's own thoughts and inner voice, etc.
  - How to respond God's promptings and grace in a concrete way
- **The Holy Spirit**
  - Basic instruction on the importance of being attentive to God's presence within us and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as wisdom, knowledge, understanding, etc.
  - Introduction to "charisms" and the reality that the Holy Spirit gives each of us unique gifts
    - Helping the Catechumen begin to discern and exercise the gifts the Holy Spirit gives to them
- **Communal Prayer**
  - Since we are "one body" in Christ, prayer is not only an individual activity
  - Opportunities to experience 1-1 or small group intercessory prayer with and for one another
  - Opportunities to experience communal prayer of thanksgiving, adoration, petition, etc.
- **Basic instruction on the intercession of the Saints**
- **Formation in how to "pray the Mass"**
  - Basic instruction on the different parts of the Mass as well as how to develop the proper disposition to enter and experience them

- The Liturgy of the Word and the importance of attentiveness in listening
  - The Liturgy of the Eucharist and its connection to praise, adoration, and thanksgiving
- Basic teaching and opportunities for personal or small group reflection on the various prayers of the Mass, such as the Confiteor, the Lamb of God, the Our Father, etc.
- **Introduction to popular devotions**
  - Basic explanation and brief exposure to popular devotions, such as the Rosary, the Divine Mercy Chaplet, the Liturgy of the Hours, novenas, pilgrimages, relics, etc.
- **Introduction to fasting**
  - Brief instruction on what fasting is and its purpose
    - Fasting as a precept of the Church
  - Exposure to the simple practice of fasting within the proper liturgical season, such as ember days during Advent or abstaining from meat on Fridays during Lent, etc.
- **Introduction to forgiveness**
  - Brief explanation of what forgiveness is and the practice of it as an essential virtue in the Christian way of life and the Kingdom
    - The Our Father petition: “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”
  - The importance of giving and receiving forgiveness
    - Its connection to healing (spiritual, emotional, and physical)
    - The “embodiment” of God’s mercy and love in us
      - Forgiveness as a spiritual work of mercy
- **Corporal and Spiritual works of Mercy**
  - Brief explanation and exposure to the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, instructing the ignorant, comforting the afflicted, etc.
    - 5<sup>th</sup> precept of the Church
  - Opportunities for building a habit of putting the works of mercy into practice in their way of life

## **E. Liturgical Catechesis:**

*“They are assisted on their journey by Mother Church with suitable liturgical rites and by them they are now gradually cleansed and sustained with divine blessing. It is appropriate to promote Celebrations of the Word for them to attend, and indeed they themselves can already come to the Liturgy of the Word with the faithful to prepare themselves better for their future participation in the Eucharist.”*

OCIA #75

- “The Church’s faith precedes the faith of the believer who is invited to adhere to it. When the Church celebrates the sacraments, she confesses the faith received from the apostles ... The law of prayer is the lay of faith: the Church believes as she prays. Liturgy is a constitutive element of the holy and living Tradition.” CCC1124



- The purpose of liturgical catechesis is not simply to impart the mechanics and definitions associated with participation in the Church's ritual life of prayer. Through experiencing the parts of the Church's liturgy that are available to them during the catechumenate, the catechumen's faith is "formed" through the example and model of the Church as presented in her liturgies. Though it is necessary to instruct the catechumen regarding the basics of the liturgies they will experience (most especially the rites associated with the catechumenate), this "catechesis" should focus primarily on experience and encounter with the Church's liturgy, not on academic instruction around its concepts.
- **Explanation and experience of the Church's liturgical seasons *as they happen during the year.***
  - Basic instruction on how the liturgical calendar follows the life of Christ and invites us to enter the mystery of Christ each year.
  - Basic instruction on the meaning of each liturgical season and its connection to the life of Christ.
  - Opportunities with the broader parish community during each liturgical season that allow the catechumen to "see" and "experience" the liturgical year.
- **Celebrations of the Word**
  - "Special Celebrations of the Word of God should be arranged for the benefit of the catechumens and their main purpose should be:
    - to implant in their hearts the teachings they are receiving...
    - to give them instruction and experience in the different aspects and ways of prayer
    - to explain to them the signs, actions, and seasons of the liturgy
    - to lead them gradually into the worship of the entire community."

OCIA #82

- **Suitable liturgical rites**
  - Though optional, these minor rites provide for the deepening liturgical and spiritual formation of the catechumens throughout their time in the catechumenate
    - Minor Exorcisms (OCIA #90-93), Blessings (OCIA #95-96), Anointing (OCIA #98-101)
- **Exposure to the Liturgy of the Word within the context of Sunday Mass**
  - Fostering the habit of attending Sunday Mass
  - Exposure to the Liturgy of the Word and the Sunday Mass
  - Dismissal after the Liturgy of the Word (unless obstacles prevent this OCIA #67) to continue to deepen the desire for baptism and the privileges it imparts (notably, participation in Eucharistic communion and the priestly role of the baptized).
    - "dismissal until they have been "incorporated into the priestly people and deputed to participate in the new worship of Christ" (OCIA 75)
- **Explanation of the meaning, structure, and script of the Rite of Election**

## F. Apostolic Catechesis:

*“Since the life of the Church is apostolic, catechumens too should learn to cooperate actively in evangelization and the building up of the Church by the testimony of their life and their profession of faith.” OCIA #75*

- **The universal call to “mission”**
  - Every Catholic is called to play a part in the mission of the Church
  - Each of us is called to bear witness to Christ
  - Our witness to Christ happens through our “words and deeds” (Evangelii Nuntiandi #21-22)
- **Witnessing to the faith in words**
  - How to engage in spiritual conversations
    - Witnessing in words does not mean “preaching at” or “arguing with” others.
    - Witnessing to our faith effectively through words requires us to engage in fruitful, open ended spiritual conversations with others.
    - “How to” initiate and participate in spiritual conversations with others.
  - How to share their testimony
    - The “what” of what we are sharing through our words with others should begin with the “testimony” of our encounter with Jesus and the difference our faith has made in our lives.
    - “How to” share my experience of Jesus in a clear, engaging and fruitful way.
- **Witnessing to the faith in deeds**
  - The “witness of how I live my life” is a necessary and powerful way to participate in the Church’s evangelization
    - Things like – offering forgiveness, patient when experiencing opposition, joyful when experiencing suffering, intentionally looking for ways to serve those in need, etc.