

Are you thinking about becoming Catholic?

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“Be doers of the word and not merely hearers.”
James 1:22

Part 1: God is calling. Now what?

Learning to Respond

God works in many different ways. Most of the time, God works through ordinary people and events—a parent, a friend, a beautiful sunset, a song, an inspiring story. Other times, we hear God’s call during crisis moments or major life-changes—a birth, an engagement, a sickness, a death. Sometimes, we just have a feeling that something is missing. No matter what your reason for thinking about becoming Catholic, our hope and prayer is that when God calls, you will respond. (If you’re reading this, you’ve already begun to respond!)

One part of the Catholic Church’s mission is to help people respond to God as best they can. For Christians, initiation and on-going participation in the life of the Church are the primary responses to God’s call. Through the process of becoming Catholic, we try to help people learn how to respond to that call not just for the moment of baptism but for every-day of their lives. The way we learn how to respond is by actually doing what Catholics do. So the process of becoming Catholic is not so much about learning things as in a classroom but learning a way of life as an apprentice learns from a master and that master’s community.

Always two there are,
a master and an apprentice.
— Yoda, *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*

Becoming an Apprentice

Becoming Catholic is like an apprenticeship. In the art department of a university I attended, there was a “master potter” who was the teacher for all the pottery students. But his students didn’t really have classes in a classroom like you would have at a school. What they did have was a lifestyle, or a discipline, and they all agreed to live by that lifestyle. In their discipline, the master potter agreed to teach them everything he knew, and the students agreed to watch the potter and follow his example. In a way, they became his disciples.

Every so often, the potter showed them a new skill, like making a tiny tea cup, while the students watched. Then he told them, “Make 100 tea cups like this every day for the next month. When you can do that, then you’re ready to go on to the next step.”

Yet the potter wasn’t only teaching skills; he was also introducing them to the lifestyle of a being a potter. So he had them eat together (using the plates and cups they made), talk about life with each other, take walks together looking at nature for inspiration, and even chop wood together for the kiln that fired their pottery. Little by little and day by day, the students were becoming potters themselves, learning by watching the master, doing as he did, and living as he lived.

Becoming Catholic is a lot like this. There are stages to follow, benchmarks to watch for, and disciplines to be learned and lived before moving on the next step. The process is called the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (often called RCIA). In Part 2: Beginning the Process of Becoming Catholic, we’ll look at the first stage of this apprenticeship into Christian life.

What made you pick up this handout and start reading it? Has something happened in your life that has made you wonder about becoming Catholic? What questions would you ask a Catholic person?

Words to know

baptism: the ritual that makes a person a full member of a Christian religion; in the Catholic Church, the ritual involves immersing the person in water and calling upon God using the traditional names of “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

Catholic: a person who lives out the Christian faith that follows the disciplines established by the Catholic Church

Christ: the Greek title given to Jesus meaning “anointed one”; in Hebrew, the title is translated as “messiah”; title that acknowledges that the person is specially chosen by God to lead and protect God’s people

Christian: a person who believes that Jesus was the Son of God, the Christ, who follows the teachings of Christ, and is baptized into the Christian faith through the ritual of baptism

discipline: habits of a group that make up a way of life based on the teachings of a person considered the group’s leader

RCIA: stands for “Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults;” process for adults for becoming Catholic

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