

What Is the Period of Inquiry?

The Period of Inquiry, also known as the Period of Evangelization or Precatechumenate, is the beginning stage of the initiation process. This period starts as soon as someone inquires about Jesus or about the Church and takes place at any time in the calendar year. Those who are participants at this stage are commonly called *inquirers*, a name which speaks to their initial introduction to and exploration of the good news of Jesus Christ.

Duration of the Period of Inquiry

The end of the Period of Inquiry takes places when a person truly desires to become a follower of Christ in the Catholic faith. The ritual text says very clearly that this first period has no fixed duration. It lasts as long as is necessary for the individual to be truly open to a relationship with God in Christ as mediated by the Catholic Church.

Those who have completed this period do not have to know everything that the Church teaches. But they do need enough introductory exposure to and understanding of the gift of Salvation so that they can embrace the life-changing potential found in the person of Jesus Christ, his message of freedom from sin, the kingdom he inaugurated among us, and the Church which serves that divine kingdom.

No Fixed Structure

In addition to this period's open-ended time frame, it can also be fairly fluid in its structure. What does that mean? It means that some Inquiry gatherings might be organized around a particular topic that helps shed light on a particular aspect of the good news of Christianity. On the other hand, sometimes a group of inquirers might get together with a

facilitator or catechist to explore their questions about the parish or faith community in a more free-flowing, impromptu fashion.

Inquirers might also be invited to some parish events as part of this stage of the initiation process, especially social events, so that they can get to meet members of the community. These types of informal experiences often generate more questions for the inquirers to explore.

A Matter of the Heart

Inquirers will come to an initial understanding of the teachings of the Catholic Church in a variety of settings and through various sources of information. This developing understanding will not come only as a result of a specific topic or set agenda. This is true because the Church in this period strives to evangelize, to share the Good News. Embracing the Gospel is not only a left-brain process of absorbing information. The good news is also very much a matter of the heart.

The goal of this period is to help people, by a variety of methods and means, begin to have a basic but genuine relationship with Jesus Christ, the one who will challenge their motivations, enrich their heart, and feed their soul.

See the following paragraphs in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults for more insights regarding this first period of the initiation process: Inquiry as introductory in nature (38), the role of the community (9), faith and conversion (18.1), the unbaptized (36), and asking for discipleship and Baptism (37).