

# Becoming an Orthodox Christian *at* Holy Annunciation Orthodox Church *A Parish of the ROCOR Diocese of Australia and New Zealand*

## **The Conversion of the Nations is the Mission of the Church**

After Christ rose from the dead, and prior to His Ascension to heaven, He gave a commission to His followers – one that we read at every baptism, and around 5 times a year as a Gospel reading. He told His followers to “Go forth into all the world and make disciples of all the nations; baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, And, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20; also, Mark 16:8)

God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”<sup>1</sup>, and that every human become a child of God in Holy Baptism – a Sacrament where every human is washed of their sin and partakes of eternal life – and learns to live in the ways of holiness, love and dignity, just as Jesus did. This is possible through learning the Christ’s commandments from His Church and keeping them, showing love for God and fellow men.

Over the course of our history in the Orthodox Church, we have been busy about this sacred commission. We have pointed to the empty tomb and the Resurrected Christ, rejoicing in the salvation provided us by God, and proclaiming His victory over death, sin and the devil. And, we have invited all to partake of the Lord by faith and baptism. These are the work of the Church. Our work started in Jerusalem, and went out from there, converting the Roman Empire. This work went east to Spain and England, west to Persia, India and China, south to North Africa, and north into the Slavic Lands. From there, it went further: through Scandanavia, the Americas, sub-Saharan Africa, East & Southeast Asia, and Australasia – such that almost every country on earth has Orthodox Christians. We continue to do this today, and will continue to make disciples of all nations, until the knowledge of God has covered the earth, or until the end of the world (at least, as we know it).

Being Apostolic is a fundamental part of the Church: that is we are not only built on the unchanging teaching of the Apostles, but we are to be messengers of the good news to the furthest reaches of the world, announcing salvation and bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to all.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Timothy 2:4

### **Disciples of Jesus Christ are Formed by Catechism**

The way that the Church makes disciples of all nations – that is, makes converts into disciples – is by catechism and preaching. The centrality of the Church’s work with catechumens is manifested by the fact that, in every Liturgy, we pray for our Catechumens.

*Pray, ye catechumens, to the Lord.*

*Ye faithful, for the catechumens let us pray, that the Lord will have mercy on them.*

*That He will catechize them with the word of Truth.*

*That He will reveal unto them the Gospel of righteousness.*

*That He will unite them to His Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.*

*Save them, have mercy on them, help them, and keep them, O God, by Thy grace.*

*Ye catechumens, bow your heads unto the Lord.*

*O Lord our God, Who dwellest on high and lookest down on things that are lowly, Who unto the human race hast sent forth salvation, Thine Only-begotten Son and God, our Lord Jesus Christ: Look upon Thy servants, the catechumens, who have bowed their necks before Thee, and vouchsafe unto them at a seasonable time the laver of regeneration, the remission of sins, and the garment of incorruption; unite them to Thy Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, and number them among Thy chosen flock.*

*That they also with us may glorify Thy most honourable and majestic name: of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.*

This litany and prayer, found soon after the reading of Holy Scripture (and, traditionally, the giving of the sermon), highlights that the Epistle and Gospel are read and the homily is given for the instruction of catechumens, as well as the edification of the faithful. This litany for the catechumens concludes with the deacon instructing catechumens to depart (traditionally, for further education) – however, at most parishes (including ours), catechumens are not required to leave. Nonetheless, it is appropriate for catechumens to keep in mind that the next part of the Liturgy is focused on gathering around the Eucharist, something that they will be able to do fully once they are members of the Body of Christ.

### **Narthex: The Place of the Catechumens**

Our church architecture bears witness to the importance of catechesis in the life of the Church. Orthodox churches are traditionally divided into three portions: the narthex, at the entryway; the

nave, or main body of the church; and the sanctuary or altar. The narthex is a place of transition – between the world (outside) and the kingdom of God (in the nave). It's also the place of the catechumens: people who have been separated from the world and brought near to the Church, but not yet been baptised and joined to the Body of Christ – within the church, but not in the heart of the church. At Holy Annunciation, the place of the narthex is denoted by the archways.

### **The Process of Catechism – A Marital Analogy**

An analogy for the process of becoming an Orthodox Christian would be the process of moving from single to married.

When a person becomes interested in the Orthodox Church, there are initial interactions – one visits for a Liturgy, researches the Church a little<sup>2</sup>, talks to a friend who knows Orthodoxy, and so on.

If a person wishes to progress further, they become an inquirer – much like dating (or courtship).

- This is a time of exhilaration and exploration – one that can be overwhelming or extraordinary. Perhaps the person has never seen anything like a Divine Liturgy, or a church full of icons staring at the inquirer, with people crossing, bowing, or lighting candles. The inquirer may not have experienced incense, sacred singing, or sacred space in general.
- It may take a while to become familiar with this – inquirers are encouraged to be patient, allowing a greater understanding and appreciation to develop over time, while also asking as many questions as occur to them to find out the depth of meaning behind each liturgical action.
- Much like a couple who are dating will want to spend time together, we ask inquirers to focus on being present at as many divine services as possible. Frequent attendance and prayer at divine services is considered to be the best catechism, because the Church prays what she believes – and vice versa.<sup>3</sup> Every service is peppered with deep theology, and all true theology is prayer.
- The inquirer should be asking themselves if they can, in fact, become an Orthodox Christian and live the Orthodox life.

At some point, the inquiry will get serious.<sup>4</sup>

- The inquirer will attend a catechism course (roughly analogous to pre-marital counselling) to begin the process of formally learning about the Orthodox Church in depth.
- Once convinced, the inquirer should be looking to recommit themselves, including arranging with the priest prospective dates for being made a catechumen.
- During this stage, the inquirer should be self-identifying as an Orthodox Christian.

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<sup>2</sup> Suggestions are found on the Catechumen's Requirements List.

<sup>3</sup> *Lex credendi est lex orandi* is the patristic dictum: the rule of faith is the rule of prayer.

<sup>4</sup> In some places, people are termed or made 'catechumens' at this stage. At our parish, however, we make a person a catechumen as the last stage of progression before being baptised.

As the big day draws closer, the person is officially made a catechumen.

- Once a person has been made a catechumen, they are committed to baptism.
- Much like an engagement – the question is no longer ‘if’, but to actively prepare for ‘when’.
- A definitive decision has been made, to become an Orthodox Christian forever – not a denominational switch, but an approach to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, founded by Christ and passed on to the Apostles, through to us today. It’s a commitment to serve as a member of the Orthodox Church anywhere on earth, for the rest of their life.

Soon after, the big day is here: the catechumen is baptised.

### **The Catechumenate through History**

A catechumen (Greek: κατηχούμενος) is an individual preparing to become a disciple of Jesus Christ and enter into His Holy Church.

In the earliest days of the Church (as seen in the early chapters of Acts, for example), many of the hearers of the Holy Apostles were baptised immediately. These are, with few exceptions, Jews or converted Greeks (‘proselytes’) – people who were in or around the Temple, and who had been waiting for the Messiah and prepared for the full Christian life and revelation.

As the last of that surge towards Christianity took place, the Apostles turned their attention to the Gentiles around them. In the ancient Church, the catechumenate – that is, the time during which one is a catechumen – often lasted for as much as three years. This is because Greeks and surrounding peoples were polytheists, and this idolatry and superstition were deeply embedded in the Greco-Roman way of life. It took time to change from a pagan mindset, and to lose these beliefs and practices, and to form the Christian mindset.

Catechism included participation in divine services, and also formal instruction from a teacher (often the bishop or appointed catechist), prayers of exorcism and entreaty, and to be deeply involved in the fellowship of their church – allowing the catechumen to form the new social connections that would integrate them with their new family, and become the most important bonds in their lives. This integration of catechumen with family of believers was not by the blood of parents or race, but by the Blood of Christ – and our ultimate loyalty should be with our brothers and sisters in Christ. This has been a hallmark of the Christian Church from its earliest days – after all, as Christ said, anyone who loves parents or children more than Him is unworthy of Him.<sup>5</sup>

While traditional paganism is not a common religion, the length of catechesis that we have in our parish is designed to help those coming from both a secularised, atheistic culture, and from western forms of Christianity – in short, to help all people become Orthodox Christians.

We do not offer a quick catechism, out of love and respect for the catechumens, as experience has taught us that the deeper the foundation that a catechumen receives, the better...and one must keep in mind that the Church isn’t going anywhere. The catechumen should be (and remain) zealous & focused, yet with consistent & sustainable effort. The entire process, from a person’s first service

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 10:37-38.

until their baptism, takes a minimum of 10-18 months, depending on a variety of factors – and may be extended if appropriate due to absences from lectures, prayers or activities, etc.

### **The Requirements for Catechumens**

Our parish has a list of requirements at each stage of progress, including faithful attendance at services, participation at parish talks, taking in other educational material, and a small amount of paperwork<sup>6</sup>.

The goal of this catechism is to be pure before God and to follow the commandments of God and His Church. Those who come from pious and active backgrounds in other Christian communities may find less need for radical change, while those who have been thoroughly secularised may need to make thorough life changes<sup>7</sup>. However, all are welcomed to the Church, because Christ is calling every human to His household and into His family – that is, the Church<sup>8</sup>.

### **The Role of the Sponsor**

Each catechumen has a godparent to help in their preparation for baptism, and through their Christian life. The bond formed between godparent and newly-baptised<sup>9</sup> is deep, mystical and eternal, one forged in a Sacrament of God. In the canons of our Faith, this bond is even stronger than that between biological relatives – that is to say, baptismal water is thicker than blood<sup>10</sup>. In addition, just like biological parents, godparents cannot be changed or replaced – rather, the relationship between godparent and godchild ought to be nourished and deepened through lifelong, mutual prayer and encouragement.

In the Sacrament of Baptism, the role of a godparent is to speak for the catechumen. This is done literally in the case of infants, where the godparent will speak the child's responses during baptism and confess the Creed on their behalf. In the case of adults, however, the godparent's role shifts to recommending the catechumen to the church, vouching for the catechumen's character to the priest, and assuring the priest that the candidate knows and believes the Nicene Creed<sup>11</sup>.

Catechumens may ask how one should identify a potential godparent. This can take place through various means, but often takes place quite naturally as the catechumen integrates himself into the life of the parish – the catechumen will speak with parishioners and establish relationships. It's an

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<sup>6</sup> These may be viewed near the end of this document.

<sup>7</sup> These may include leaving illegitimate or immoral employment, leaving organisations that go against Christianity, and deep repentance from sins. Conversation may be required in the event of previous marriages and divorces. Yet, while adjustments may need to be made (some severe), none of these are a permanent barrier to baptism, and all are called to follow Christ within His Church. If you are uncertain of any of these, please speak with your priest.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Timothy 3:15

<sup>9</sup> Also called 'newly-illuminated'.

<sup>10</sup> This includes certain canonical restrictions on the marriages between a godparent and the family of their godchild, as 'spiritual kinship is better than bodily union' (Canon 53, 6<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council).

<sup>11</sup> A recommended way to do this for the catechumen to recite the Creed to their godparent and to explain its basic meaning.

important decision, one that should be done prayerfully. Before asking a potential godparent, the catechumen should confirm this choice with our priest in order to avoid potential embarrassment.

Some requirements include:

- The godparent must be an Orthodox Christian in good standing, and must know their faith.
  - (e.g. if a person has attended a catechism course, this would fulfil the requirement).
- The godparent must be of the same sex as the catechumen.
  - A second sponsor of the opposite sex is not required, but is permissible.
- The godparent must be over 13 years of age.

Because of the important role they play, it must be said that not every person – even an Orthodox Christian – is necessarily qualified to be a godparent, and this is why we ask catechumens to confirm their choice with our priest.

The role of the godparent only begins at baptism. They need to:

- Pray for their godchild (and their parents, if the godchild was a child), knowing that they will be accountable for what they did (and didn't do).
  - Likewise, the godchild should pray for their godparent.
- Celebrate the anniversary of the baptism and the godchild's nameday.
- Learn about their godchild's patron saint.
- Model the Orthodox Faith through their actions. They must be ready for questions from their godchild by understanding both the sacraments and the teachings of the church.
- Give gifts that encourage the spiritual life, including a Bible, a prayer book, books on the lives of saints, a prayer rope, and so on. This gives your godchild tools to help them grow in the Faith, and to start a personal library of Orthodox teachings.
- Spend time with their godchild outside of church – social events, going for coffee, and other things designed to improve your relationship with them. If you live at a distance, contact them via other means – call, write, e-mail, plan visits, etc. Be a friend in Christ to them, helping them progress in the knowledge and practice of the faith – knowing that they are one of your cherished brothers or sisters in Christ.
- Pray through the good times and bad with your godchild. Talk about God in the context of these – speaking with knowledge, not just opinion.
- Encourage your godchild to go with you to church services. Discuss sermons with them.
- Serve God alongside your godchild. You could work at a service project together, such as visiting the housebound or feeding the homeless, or discover ways to use God-given talents to help others, such as artistic talents to design posters or musical talents to sing in church or for the housebound.

And likewise, a godchild has obligations towards their godparent:

- Make sure that you pray for your godparent, as they pray for you.
- The godchild should also work to develop a close and loving relationship with their godparent. Ideally, godparent and godchild should be as close to each other as family.
- A godchild should pray for their godparent each time they enter church, lighting candles for them.

- A godchild should remember a godparent's namesday – celebrating like a birthday, with a spiritually-oriented gift.
- If your godparents are significantly older, they may be less able to be as present as they were previously – perhaps due to illness, or nursing home, etc. Continue to pray for them, visit them and keep in contact, and ask for their advice (as appropriate).
  - If this is the case, then after their repose, remember to offer memorial services in their memory along with good works and alms in their name – and most importantly, pray for them, just as they continue to do for you in heaven.

From St John Chrysostom addresses a short section to the role of the godparent<sup>12</sup>:

*Shall I say something to your godparents and sponsors, so that they may know how they are rewarded for their care, and condemned for their carelessness?*

*Beloved: those who are guarantor for a loan are at greater risk than those who borrow money. If the borrower is good, the guarantor has less burden; if not, then the risk is higher. For this reason, Proverbs 6 tells us that the one who goes guarantor should assume that they have to pay the money.*

*If this is the case for money – that guarantors are liable for the total – then much moreso for godparents. They should show love to those being baptised by encouragement, counselling, and correcting.*

*Being a sponsor is a significant thing.*

*Godparents need to know that if their teaching leads their godchild to the path of virtue, they share in the credit; yet, if their godchild becomes careless, the godparent will undergo punishment.*

*For this reason, we call sponsors 'godparents' – so that through this, they learn the love and spiritual instruction they must show to their godchildren.*

*It is noble to lead a random person to zeal for virtue – so much more should we do this for our godchildren.*

*In short: godparents ought know that there are consequences to any neglect.*

### **Great and Holy Saturday and Baptism**

Traditionally, catechumens would be received into the Church during the Liturgy for Great and Holy Saturday – that is, in the middle of the service<sup>13</sup>. Because of its connection with the Resurrection and to multiply our Paschal joy, we have designed our program around our catechumens being received into the Church at Pascha.

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<sup>12</sup> Paraphrased from 'Baptismal Instructions: The Second Instruction'. For the original translation, see: [http://www.christopherklitou.com/page\\_five.htm](http://www.christopherklitou.com/page_five.htm)

<sup>13</sup> If necessary, we have other appropriate feastdays when this can be done. Necessary cases may include being unprepared for Baptism, menstruation, illness, etc. If you need to, please discuss the date with our priest after you have begun your catechism.

## **Service of Reception of Converts**

The normative means for the reception of all converts is via Holy Baptism. This practice is followed in our diocese (and, therefore, in our parish).

However, at the discretion of our bishop, catechumens who come to the Orthodox Church from western Christian denominations may be received by life confession, renunciation of heresy, and Chrismation. If you wish to undertake this pastoral accommodation, please speak with Fr Andrew.

A person is made a catechumen through prayers of exorcisms, together with renunciations of evil and affirmations of the Nicene Creed. For persons being baptised at Pascha, we would normally serve this on Forgiveness Sunday (i.e. the day before Great Lent). These exorcisms and affirmations are done to help the catechumen to break the hold of evil, and allow them to struggle towards purification and holiness.

We encourage you to read the service for the Vespereal Baptismal Divine Liturgy for Great and Holy Saturday<sup>14</sup>. In brief:

- the catechumens arrive for the Vespereal Liturgy with sufficient time to prepare<sup>15</sup>.
- The priest will bless the waters of the font during the 15 Old Testament readings, and the catechumens will process to the font with the priest, followed by the congregation.
- The catechumens are anointed with the oil of gladness and are baptised (immersed three times), before returning to the church, where they are clothed in their baptismal robe, chrismated and tonsured.
- They process around the font three times, hear the Epistle and Gospel for Holy Saturday (the readings of all baptisms), and the Liturgy culminates in Communion, with the newly-illuminated as the first communicants – thus being established as full members of the Church.
- Near the end of the Liturgy, a small amount of hair is cut, and any excess Chrism is wiped off<sup>16</sup>.

After they are received into the Church, these newly-illuminated are termed 'neophytes' (literally meaning 'new plants'), and typically not brought into lay leadership for at least one year.

## **A Final Word to Catechumens**

Catechism is a road of repentance and faith, one that leads to union with the Trinity and membership in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. This is a road towards Christ and away from the evil one – and for this reason, we warn that those who seek baptism should expect

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<sup>14</sup> For a copy of the text and rubrics of this service, please see our Great Lent and Holy Week Resource page: [www.HolyAnnunciation.net/Lent](http://www.HolyAnnunciation.net/Lent)

<sup>15</sup> We recommend 8:15am – that is, 15 minutes prior to the start of the service.

<sup>16</sup> If the baptism occurs on other days, however, the process is much the same – simply separated from the Liturgy itself.

NB: All Orthodox Christians receive Baptism, and Chrismation, and Communion – whether a newborn or elderly, whether 'convert' or 'cradle'.

opposition, demonic and worldly. These can be overcome – by the mercy of God, through a strong resolve from the one seeking baptism, and the prayers of their parish.

### **Bibliography**

The idea and original structure for this handbook was from ‘Starting Down the Royal Path: How to become an Orthodox Christian’, by Archpriest Josiah Trenham, Ph.D. (available online<sup>17</sup>), who serves at St Andrew’s Orthodox Christian Church in Riverside, California.

Other sources are provided in footnotes.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.saintandrew.net/files/catechumen%20info/Starting-Down-the-Royal-Path.pdf>

## Steps along the Road to Baptism

### Guest

*What happens:* A person visits an Orthodox parish.

*How long:* For as long as a person wants.

*Commitment:* There is no commitment.

*What is involved in this step:*

- Visiting services
- Private research (including books, podcasts, movies, etc)

*To transition to the next step:*

- Read or listen to one of these introductory works:
  - Discover the Church, by Dcn Andrew Smith. Book.
  - *The Orthodox Faith: Doctrine & Scripture, Worship, Spirituality*, by Fr Thomas Hopko (Books 1, 2 & 4. *Optional:* Book 3, Church History). Series of Books, available online: <https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/>
  - *The Orthodox Church*, by Metr. Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia. Book, available online: [passaicrussianchurch.com/books/english/history\\_timothy\\_ware\\_1.htm](http://passaicrussianchurch.com/books/english/history_timothy_ware_1.htm); and, [passaicrussianchurch.com/books/english/history\\_timothy\\_ware\\_2.htm](http://passaicrussianchurch.com/books/english/history_timothy_ware_2.htm)
  - *Foundations of the Orthodox Faith*, by Fr Andrew Stephen Damick. Podcast: [http://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/series/foundations\\_of\\_the\\_orthodox\\_faith](http://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/series/foundations_of_the_orthodox_faith)
- Decide to enter the Orthodox Church.

### **Inquirer (initial)**

*What happens:* A person speaks with our priest, and discusses that they are looking into the Orthodox Church. This person is now an inquirer.

*How long:* Times can vary, but at least one section of the catechism should be completed.

*Commitment:* A person can cease being an inquirer at any time – they simply have to inform our priest.

*What is involved in this step:*

- Faithful attendance at church services (Vigil and Liturgy, on weekends and at feastsdays),
- Beginning to participate in the Foundations of Spiritual Life (Prayer, Fasting, Scripture Reading, Charity & Stewardship, Morality), under guidance.
- Reading, listening to or viewing (as appropriate) at least two of the following introductory texts (or, if this is a problem, discussing their completion with our priest):
  - Discover the Church, by Dcn Andrew Smith. Book.
  - *The Orthodox Faith: Doctrine & Scripture, Worship, Spirituality*, by Fr Thomas Hopko (Books 1, 2 & 4. *Optional:* Book 3, Church History). Series of Books, available online: <https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/>
  - *The Orthodox Church*, by Metr. Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia. Book, available online: [passaicrussianchurch.com/books/english/history\\_timothy\\_ware\\_1.htm](http://passaicrussianchurch.com/books/english/history_timothy_ware_1.htm); and, [passaicrussianchurch.com/books/english/history\\_timothy\\_ware\\_2.htm](http://passaicrussianchurch.com/books/english/history_timothy_ware_2.htm)
  - *Foundations of the Orthodox Faith*, by Fr Andrew Stephen Damick. Podcast: [http://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/series/foundations\\_of\\_the\\_orthodox\\_faith](http://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/series/foundations_of_the_orthodox_faith)
  - (NB: Optionally, the inquirer may wish to progress to any other text, video or podcast listed in the 'Inquirer (serious) stage'.)
- The Inquirer is given a copy of the Nicene Creed. This is to help the inquirer to memorise it as they prepare for baptism, in the same translation that our parish uses.

*To transition to the next step:*

- Submit a Personal Information Form
- Enrol in Catechism Course
- As above:
  - Attending services,
  - Participating in foundation of spiritual life,
  - Reading 2 introductory texts,
  - Reading Nicene Creed frequently.

## **Inquirer (*serious*)**

*What happens:* An inquirer will speak with the priest, and state their desire to be received into the Orthodox Church; or, prior to the beginning of a Catechism course, the priest will ask the inquirer if they wish to be received into the Orthodox Church. If the inquirer agrees, the priest will pray a prayer with the inquirer, asking a blessing on their journey to baptism.

*How long:* Times can vary, but the minimum inquiry period (for both 'initial' and 'serious') can last anywhere from 7 to 13 months.

*Commitment:* A person can cease being an inquirer at any time – they simply have to inform our priest.

*What is involved in this step:*

- All of the steps in the 'Inquirer (initial)' stage:
  - Faithful attendance at church services (Vigil and Liturgy, on weekends and at feastdays),
  - Beginning to participate in the Foundations of Spiritual Life (Prayer, Fasting, Scripture Reading, Charity & Stewardship, Morality), under guidance.
  - Reading, listening to or viewing at least 2 introductory works (listed above).
- The person will attend a catechism course – running in two parts, from approximately August to December and February to April.
  - Each talk must be attended. If a person needs to be absent, they must discuss this with our priest – and, if approved, must listen to a recording.
  - Each talk comes with questions that must be answered.
- An inquirer must read, listen to or view (as appropriate) the following, or discuss their completion with our priest:
  - 'Fountain of Immortality: A Meditation on the Orthodox Divine Liturgy' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hm2qSeiTCfI>)
  - 'Fishers of Men: Winning Converts to the Orthodox Faith' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fm2a2WeldI>)
  - One of these, on Baptism:
    - *Of Water and the Spirit*, by Fr Alexander Schmemmann. Book.
    - "The Mystery of Holy Baptism", by Fr Josiah Trenham. Online talk (audio): [http://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/thearena/free\\_part\\_2\\_lecture\\_1\\_the\\_mystery\\_of\\_holy\\_baptism](http://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/thearena/free_part_2_lecture_1_the_mystery_of_holy_baptism)
  - *Theosis: The True Purpose of Human Life*, by Archim. George of Grigoriou Monastery, Mt Athos. Book, available online: <http://orthodoxinfo.com/general/theosis-english.pdf>
  - *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers (a selection)*. (<http://www.orthodoxebooks.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/The%20Sayings%20of%20the%20Desert%20Fathers%20-%20Desert%20Fathers.pdf>)
  - *Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy*, by Fr Andrew Stephen Damick. Available as either a:
    - Book, or
    - Podcast series: <http://ancientfaith.com/podcasts/orthodoxyheterodoxy> (Optional: The Radical Reformation 2a & 2b, Non-Mainstream Christianity, 1a & 1c & 2a)

- *The Basis of the Social Concept*, adopted by the Russian Orthodox Church. Compulsory sections: I, III, VIII, X, XI, XII, XIII, XIV (*all others optional*).  
<https://mospat.ru/en/documents/social-concepts/>
- Optional: *The Beginnings of a Life of Prayer*, by Archim. Irenei (Steenberg – now Bishop of Sacramento).

*To transition to the next step:*

- Submitted the following forms:
  - Patron Saint Form
  - Renunciations and Affirmations Form
  - Living the Orthodox Faith Form
  - If registered as a member with another religious group, then a letter must be sent to that group asking to be removed from their membership roster.
- Attended all talks of a section, and answered any questions
- Be certain of truth of the Orthodox Christian Faith, and ready to undertake a lifelong commitment
- As above:
  - Attending services,
  - Participating in foundation of spiritual life,
  - Read above 7 texts, podcasts, or videos
  - Reading Nicene Creed frequently.

## Catechumen

*What happens:* At the beginning of the fasting period prior to their baptism (i.e. normally Forgiveness Sunday), an inquirer is asked to confirm that they want to be baptised, and that they believe all that the Orthodox Church teaches. If so, they are made a catechumen. This happens by a short service (~15mins) that occurs at the entrance of the church.

*How long:* This lasts for approximately 8 weeks.

*Commitment:* A Catechumen is part of the Church, albeit on the fringes. It is expected that they will be baptised<sup>18</sup>. We pray for catechumens in our litanies, and we also pray for our catechumens by name at Proskomedia. (Also, in the event that a catechumen reposes, the Church is able to bury them with an Orthodox funeral service).

*What is involved in this step:*

- Reading the Service of Baptism once a week.
- Read the Book of Genesis, the Book of Isaiah, the Book of Proverbs.
- Read the 15 Old Testament Readings<sup>19</sup> from Holy Saturday: Exodus 12:1-11 & 13:20-15:19, the Book of Jonah, Joshua 5:10-15, Zephaniah 3:8-15, 3 Kings 17:8-24<sup>20</sup>, 4 Kings 4:8-37<sup>21</sup>, Jeremiah, 31:31-34, Daniel 3:1-88.
- Attendance at Lenten and Holy Week services.
- After discussion and approval of your selection from our priest, a Godparent.
- Other things required for the service of baptism (the Catechumen should ask which items the Godparent will, or is able to, purchase or provide):
  - Baptismal Cross (and chain)
    - Note: If you want a costly cross, please let your Godparent know that you will be making this purchase.
    - Otherwise, if your godparent is purchasing your cross, you may need to discuss any requests you may have.
  - Towel
  - Black clothing for baptism.
    - This must be loose and modest.
    - For men, we can recommend a large black t-shirt and long shorts.
    - For women, we can recommend a large black t-shirt (that falls to below the hips), either long shorts or leggings, and a one-piece bathing suit underneath.
  - An icon of your patron saint (blessed prior to the baptism).
  - *Optional:* Baptismal robe (if you wish to keep yours), Baptismal candle.

*To transition to the next step:*

- Attended all talks of catechism, and answered any questions
- Be certain of truth of the Orthodox Christian Faith, and ready to undertake a lifelong commitment

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<sup>18</sup> NB: a catechumen who then elects not to be baptised is considered to have left and rejected the Church.

<sup>19</sup> Note: the number is different because Genesis and Isaiah make up the remainder of the readings.

<sup>20</sup> In the KJV, this is listed as '1 Kings'

<sup>21</sup> In the KJV, this is listed as 2 Kings

- Have a godparent (of same sex)
- Obtaining all items required for baptism
- As above:
  - Attending services,
  - Participating in foundation of spiritual life,
  - Read above Scripture, and baptismal service
  - Read above 7 texts, podcasts, or videos
  - Reading Nicene Creed frequently.

## **Baptismal Candidate**

*What happens:* The person is baptised on Holy Saturday (or, if decided by our priest, on select other days in the year).

*How long:* On the day of baptism.

*What is involved in this step:* At the appointed time, the Candidate will be brought in procession to the baptismal font. Wearing black, they will be anointed, baptised (by full immersion), clothed in white, then brought back into the church to be chrismated, communed (during the Liturgy) and tonsured.

## **Newly-Baptised**

*What happens:* From here, you begin the road to sanctity – with belief in the Triune God, including Christ our Saviour, you then continue to receive the sacraments and offer back whatever it is you can to Him.

*How long:* For the rest of your life.

*Commitment:* Life-long.

*What is involved in this step:* Living the basics of the Spiritual Life, now also including the Sacraments. Attending Vigil and Liturgy on Weekends and Great Feasts, and taking every opportunity for Communion. Taking opportunities for further spiritual development, such as Bible Study and public talks.