Name _____

The Journey of the Catechumen

1. Period of Inquiry

An unbaptized person is attracted to the Catholic faith and asks to know more about the Church. The person is invited to become an "inquirer." This is an open-ended period of exploring the faith and a period of *evangelization* in which the inquirer experiences the Gospel through word and witness. Someone baptized in another Christian denomination may participate and is called a candidate.

2. Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens

This first rite follows the inquirer's decision to proceed with plans to become a member of the Church. This rite can take place at any time, but always involves a Liturgy of the Word and usually takes place during a Sunday liturgy. Often several people participate in this rite, especially in larger parishes.

3. Period of the Catechumenate

During this period, which can last from one to three years, the catechumen is formed in the faith by catechesis, spiritual development, the Liturgy of the Word, and apostolic witness. Catechumens are led to seek knowledge of the mystery of Christ, to grow close to Christ in prayer, to celebrate Christ's love in the liturgy, and to learn from other followers to witness to Christ through their actions in the world.

4. Rite of Election

This rite is usually held on the first Sunday of Lent and is celebrated by the bishop. In smaller dioceses, it takes place in the cathedral. In larger dioceses, there may be several celebrations by different bishops. This rite is the formal acceptance of the catechumens as candidates for Baptism. From this point onward, they are no longer catechumens, but the "elect."

5. Scrutinies

The elect participate in three liturgical rites on the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent to encourage them and to strengthen their faith. These rites include intercessions and an exorcism, a prayer designed to help the elect acknowledge their weaknesses and trust in God. Lent commemorates Jesus' forty days in the desert after his Baptism and is a special time of preparation for the elect.

6. Presentation of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer

During the third and fifth weeks of Lent, two central Christian prayers are presented to the elect.

7. Easter Vigil

During the Easter Vigil, the holiest night of the year, the elect are fully received into the Church through Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. This celebration has been the goal of the catechumen/elect. It is the central celebration for all Christians.

8. Mystagogy

A period after Easter in which the new Christian and the community together grow in deepening their grasp of the Paschal Mystery. During this time, the elect are now called *neophytes,* which means "beginners." These new Christians are powerful witnesses to the faith, but they also—like all of us—need the support of a community of faith.

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