

Holy Apostles Catechism Information

2026-2027 Cycle

Catechumen Requirements at a Glance

Most catechumens are received after approximately one year of preparation, with the priest's blessing, after requirements are completed.

- **Worship:** Attend Sunday Divine Liturgy faithfully; attend Feast Day Liturgies and other services as you are able.
- **Prayer and fasting:** Begin to learn and observe Orthodox practices under pastoral guidance.
- **Catechism:** Attend all required lectures/classes in person.
- **Forms:** Submit required forms (Information, Prayer Rule, Patron Saint, Stewardship, Baptism/Chrismation paperwork).
- **Sponsor:** Identify and obtain priest approval for a godparent/sponsor before you ask them.
- **Reading:** Complete the required catechism reading and any assigned supplemental reading.
- **Church visits:** Visit at least two other canonical Orthodox parishes for services and report them.
- **Confession:** Following reception into the Church, begin a regular confession rule with spiritual Father (parish priest)
- **Great Lent & Holy Week:** Increase attendance; plan for as many Holy Week services as possible.

Deadline for Saturday of Lazarus reception: All requirements must be completed by the 4th Sunday of Great Lent, St. John Climacus Sunday (unless otherwise blessed by the priest).

The Conversion of the Nations and the Mission of the Church

After His Resurrection and before His Ascension, our Lord Jesus Christ commissioned His disciples to make disciples of all nations.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

It is the will of God that every human person be saved, reborn through Holy Baptism, cleansed of sin, and made a partaker of eternal life. The Holy Trinity calls all people to learn the life of Christ as the Church teaches, prays, and lives it.

For two thousand years the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church has carried out this work: proclaiming Christ crucified and risen, inviting all nations to salvation by faith and Baptism, and gathering the world into the life of the Kingdom. Each parish is a concrete outpost of this mission in its own community.

A catechumen (Greek: κατηχούμενος) is one who is being formed as a disciple of Jesus Christ and prepared for entry into His Holy Church. In the Acts of the Apostles, many were baptized immediately, especially Jews and God-fearing Greeks, whose lives under the Old Covenant had already formed a long preparation for Christ. As the Gospel spread to the Greeks and other peoples shaped by polytheism and idolatry, a longer period of catechesis became necessary. In the ancient Church, this period often lasted up to three years in order to form a Christian mind, way of life, and loyalties.

Catechesis was never merely instructional. It included participation in the divine services, formal teaching, special prayers, and integration into the life of the Church, forming bonds rooted in Christ rather than in tribe or blood. From the beginning, the Church understood that ultimate loyalty belongs to Christ and His Body.

In the contemporary West, catechesis is designed to help those shaped by secularism or Western Christianity become fully Orthodox. For this reason, catechesis often lasts at least one year and is often longer, depending on when one enrolls and the level of participation. There is no abbreviated path into Orthodox life; depth of formation matters more than speed. Catechumens are expected to be attentive, faithful, and patient, progressing at a sustainable pace under pastoral guidance.

Although the catechumenate diminished in lands where most were baptized as infants, it is being renewed wherever the Church is again receiving adult converts. In this way, an ancient practice has naturally reemerged as part of the Church's life and mission.

Catechism Class Sessions: 2026-2027 Cycle

Class sessions will be held at church (25350 Poland Rd. Chantilly, VA 20152) in the parish multi-purpose room. Adjustments will be announced as needed. Class readings will be announced as the course proceeds. Attendance in person is expected, please contact Fr. Thomas at frthomas@hagoc.org to discuss attendance if unable to attend regularly in person.

Date	Topic
9/11/2026	Intro to Orthodoxy/Church History 1
9/18/2026	Church History 2
9/25/2026	Intro to the Trinity
10/2/2026	Church History 3
10/9/2026	Church History 4
10/16/2026	Intro to Jesus and Salvation
10/23/2026	Orthodox Worship/The Divine Liturgy 1
10/30/2026	Eucharist/The Divine Liturgy 2
11/6/2026	Sacraments - Matrimony & Holy Orders
11/13/2026	Sacraments - Baptism & Chrismation
11/20/2026	Matins & Vespers
11/27/2026	NO CLASS - Thanksgiving Weekend
12/4/2026	The Theotokos
12/11/2026	The Church Calendar and Liturgical Cycle
12/18/2026	NO CLASS - Preparation for Nativity
12/25/2026	NO CLASS - Feast of the Nativity
1/1/2027	NO CLASS - Feast of St. Basil
1/8/2027	Nicene Creed 1 - The Father
1/15/2027	Nicene Creed 2 - The Son
1/22/2027	Nicene Creed 3 - The Holy Spirit
1/29/2027	Nicene Creed 4 - The Church
2/5/2027	The Canon of Scripture
2/12/2027	Scripture and Tradition
2/19/2027	Icons
2/26/2027	The Saints
3/5/2027	Praying for the Dead
3/12/2027	Lent and Fasting
3/19/2027	NO CLASS - Salutations Service

3/26/2027	NO CLASS - Salutations Service
4/2/2027	NO CLASS - Salutations Service
4/9/2027	NO CLASS - Salutations Service
4/16/2027	NO CLASS - Akathist Service
4/23/2027	NO CLASS - Preparation for Holy Week
4/30/2027	NO CLASS - Holy Week
5/7/2027	NO CLASS - Bright Week
5/14/2027	NO CLASS - Parish Festival Weekend
5/21/2027	The Resurrection
5/28/2027	TBD
6/4/2027	TBD
6/11/2027	TBD

Reading Lists

Required

Essential Orthodox Christian Beliefs (EOCB): A Manual for Adult Instruction. Departments of the Orthodox Church in America. <https://www.oca.org/cdn/PDFs/2023-0609-EOCB.pdf>

Recommended (As Appropriate)

A Beginner's Guide to Prayer: The Orthodox Way to Draw Closer to God. Fr. Michael Keiser. Available for purchase at <https://archangelsbooks.com/products/a-beginner-s-guide-to-prayer-the-orthodox-way-to-draw-closer-to-god-christian-life-book>

Beginning to Pray. Metropolitan Anthony Bloom. Available for purchase at <https://store.ancientfaith.com/beginning-to-pray-metropolitan-anthony-bloom/>

Didache: The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles. Available for purchase at <https://legacyicons.com/didache-the-teaching-of-the-twelve-apostles-hardcover>

The Eastern Orthodox Church: A New History. John Anthony McGuckin. Available for purchase at <https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300218763/the-eastern-orthodox-church>

For the Life of the World. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann. Available for purchase at <https://svspress.com/for-the-life-of-the-world-new-edition/>

Great Lent. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann. Available for purchase at <https://svspress.com/great-lent/>

How Are We Saved? The Understanding of Salvation in the Orthodox Tradition. Met. Kallistos (Timothy) Ware. Available for purchase at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/193365452X>

Know the Faith: A Handbook for Orthodox Christians and Inquirers. Fr. Michael Shanbour. Available for purchase at <https://store.ancientfaith.com/know-the-faith>

The Mind of the Orthodox Church. Met. Hierotheos Vlachos. Available for purchase at <https://store.ancientfaith.com/the-mind-of-the-orthodox-church/>

The Mountain of Silence. Kyriacos Markides. Available for purchase at <https://store.ancientfaith.com/the-mountain-of-silence-a-search-for-orthodox-spirituality/>

On the Priesthood. St. John Chrysostom. Available for purchase at <https://svspress.com/on-the-priesthood-six-books-st-john-chrysostom/>

The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Eastern Christianity. Met. Kallistos (Timothy) Ware. Available for purchase at <https://store.ancientfaith.com/the-orthodox-church-ware>

The Orthodox Faith. Fr. Thomas Hopko. Available online at <https://www.oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith> or for purchase at <https://svspress.com/the-orthodox-faith-four-volume-set>

The Orthodox Way. Met. Kallistos (Timothy) Ware. Available for purchase at <https://store.ancientfaith.com/the-orthodox-way>

Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy: Finding the Way to Christ in a Complicated Religious Landscape. Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick. Available for purchase at <https://store.ancientfaith.com/orthodoxy-and-heterodoxy-finding-the-way-to-christ-in-a-complicated-religious-landscape>

Toolkit for Spiritual Growth: Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving. Fr. Evan Armatas. Available for purchase at <https://store.ancientfaith.com/toolkit-for-spiritual-growth/>

Thinking Orthodox: Understanding and Acquiring the Orthodox Christian Mind. Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou. Available for Purchase at <https://store.ancientfaith.com/thinking-orthodox>

Wounded by Love. St. Porhpyrios. Available for purchase at <https://store.ancientfaith.com/products/Wounded-by-Love.html>

The Process of Catechism: Courtship, Engagement, Marriage

Becoming Orthodox often unfolds in a pattern similar to courtship, engagement, and marriage:

1. **Inquirer (courtship):** initial exploration through attending services, learning, and asking questions.

During the period of inquiry, the seeker is encouraged to attend the divine services as frequently and attentively as possible. The Church prays what she believes and believes what she prays; therefore, the services themselves are the primary school of theology. In this time of discernment, the inquirer should also read at least one introductory text on the Orthodox Church (see recommended books later in this document).

2. **Catechumen (engagement):** a decisive commitment to enter the Church and prepare for reception.

As this period deepens, the inquirer may begin to ask whether he could truly live the Orthodox life. This is a natural development, similar to a couple in courtship beginning to consider marriage. After a sustained period of serious inquiry, ordinarily no less than two months, the seeker may desire to be formally enrolled as a catechumen in preparation for reception into the Church.

This step is comparable to engagement. Once the question of commitment has been answered, the focus is no longer on whether one intends to enter the Church, but on preparing for that reception. It becomes a matter not of if, but when.

At this point, the inquirer seeks the blessing of the parish priest and requests enrollment as a catechumen. If the priest judges the inquirer to be ready, he reads the Prayer for the Enrollment of a Catechumen, formally admitting the seeker into the catechumenate. This is done on a given Sunday before the Creed is recited. The parish priest will invite those to be enrolled to the front of the church, and the prayer of enrollment will be given.

3. **Reception (marriage):** Holy Baptism (and/or Chrismation), sealing full membership in the Body of Christ.

At this stage, the inquirer has made a definitive commitment to become an Orthodox Christian, not as a change of denomination, but as an entry into the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. This commitment is lifelong and universal, wherever one may live. The catechumen is now engaged to the Church, with holy baptism as the fulfillment of that engagement.

From this point, the catechumen belongs to a particular parish and begins formal

catechesis. He identifies publicly as an Orthodox Christian (in formation) and, as appropriate, formally withdraws from previous religious affiliations. Should the catechumen die before reception into the Church, they will be buried as an Orthodox Christian.

Catechumen Requirements

Ongoing Requirements Until Illumination (Baptism/Chrismation):

- Attend Sunday Divine Liturgy faithfully, and Feast Day Liturgies as possible, along with other services when you are able.
- Learn and begin observing Orthodox prayer and fasting practices under pastoral guidance.
- Present yourself for the Catechumen Litany each Sunday; the Church prays for you in a special way.
- Attend catechism classes and required lectures in person.

Great Lent and Holy Week

- Attend Lenten services as your primary preparation leading into reception.
- Plan to attend all, or as many services as possible, during Holy Week.

If a catechumen hopes to be received on the coming Saturday of Lazarus, all requirements must be completed by the 4th Sunday of Great Lent (unless otherwise blessed by the priest). Progress on requirements must be reported to the Catechumen Coordinator as items are completed. The coordinator maintains a checklist for review by Father, who determines readiness for reception soon after the second week of Lent.

Saturday of Lazarus. In the cycle of Holy Week and Pascha, the Saturday of Lazarus falls on the day before Palm Sunday (the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem) and is one week before the celebration of Pascha itself. Though Holy Saturday (the day before Pascha) is the traditional feast to be received into the Church, at Holy Apostles we use Saturday of Lazarus to receive new people. In this way, the newly illumined are able to participate fully in Holy Week as sacramental members of the Church.

Forms and Documentation

All required forms must be completed and returned to the Catechumen Coordinator. Some are due soon after enrollment; others take time.

- Catechumen Information Form: complete immediately.
- Prayer Rule Form: Complete soon after enrollment. Schedule a meeting with the priest to review and approve your prayer rule. Provide a copy of the approved rule to the coordinator.
- Patron Saint Form: Choose a patron saint (your Christian name used at the sacraments). Discuss and receive approval from the priest before submitting the form.
- Stewardship Form: Submit ideally upon becoming a catechumen, and no later than the stated deadline. A current-year stewardship form must be on file before reception.
- Baptism/Chrismation Form: Provides the information needed for your certificate from the Metropolis. Return to the coordinator.

Baptism or Chrismation

There are two mysteries (sacraments) that bring one into the full life of the Church. The first is the mystery of Baptism (our participation in the death and resurrection of the Lord) and the mystery of Chrismation (our becoming the temple of the Holy Spirit). All those preparing for reception into the Church will undergo both of these mysteries.

Chrismation Only. Because the Church believes in “one baptism for the forgiveness of sins” (Nicene Creed), the current practice in America is to not rebaptize those who have been previously baptized into the Trinitarian formula as given by our Lord at the end of the Gospel of Matthew 28. If one is coming from a Trinitarian Christian communion (Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Episcopal, Reformed), they are received only by Chrismation. In such a situation, the catechumen must provide a baptismal certificate from the Christian communion they were baptized in. If the catechumen cannot provide a proper baptismal document, then the practice is to receive them by both Baptism & Chrismation. For questions concerning specific Christian communions, please speak to the parish priest or the catechumen coordinator.

Accepted Christian Communions for Chrismation (& Marriage):

- Anglican - Church of England
- African Methodist Episcopal
- Armenian Orthodox
- Assembly of God, Baptist
- Church of Christ
- Church of the Brethren
- Coptic Orthodox
- Disciples of Christ
- Dutch Reformed
- Episcopalian
- Ethiopian Orthodox
- Lutheran
- Malankara Syrian Orthodox
- Methodist

- Moravian
- Presbyterian
- Roman Catholic
- Syrian Orthodox of Antioch
- Reformed Church in America

Baptism & Chrismation. If the catechumen has never been baptized, has not been baptized into the Trinitarian formula, or cannot provide the proper baptismal document, then their reception into the Orthodox Church is through BOTH Baptism & Chrismation.

Reading Assignments

Required text:

- Essential Orthodox Christian Beliefs: A Manual for Adult Instruction (Orthodox Church in America).

Recommended books (optional, as appropriate):

- Know the Faith (Fr. Michael Shanbour)
- For the Life of the World (Fr. Alexander Schmemmann)
- Great Lent (Fr. Alexander Schmemmann)
- Beginning to Pray (Metropolitan Anthony Bloom)
- The Orthodox Way (Metropolitan Kallistos Ware)
- The Mountain of Silence (Kyriacos Markides)
- Wounded by Love (St. Porphyrios)
- On the Priesthood (St. John Chrysostom)
- The Mind of the Church (Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos)
- Thinking Orthodox: Understanding and Acquiring the Orthodox Christian Mind (Dr. Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou)
- Toolkit for Spiritual Growth: Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving by Fr. Evan Armatas

Godparent / Sponsor

Every person received into the Church has a sponsor (godparent). The normative practice is that one sponsor of the same sex, approved by the priest, stands with each new Orthodox Christian at their baptism/Chrismation. An additional sponsor is not required and are permitted at the priest's discretion (for example, a husband and wife together as godparents). Multiple sponsors of the same sex are not permitted.

The sponsor's role is serious and lifelong: to vouch for the candidate, to help ensure the Nicene Creed is known and confessed, and to support the new Orthodox Christian through prayer, encouragement, and practical guidance.

Important: You must discuss your intended sponsor with the priest and receive approval before you ask the person.

Preparing to Be Illumined at Holy Pascha

You will need the following items for reception. Coordinate early with your sponsor regarding who will purchase what.

- Baptismal (Orthodox) cross
- Baptismal candle
- Icon of your patron saint (provided either by yourself or sponsor)
- Baptism robe or white garment/outfit

If you are being baptized (not only chrismated), you also need:

- A new white towel
- Black clothing for the baptism itself (see guidance below)

Guidance on Specific Items

The Cross: Choose carefully. This cross is normally worn for life. If you desire a costly cross (for example, gold), you may wish to tell your sponsor that it is not expected of them.

The Candle: Plan early. Candles should be beeswax.

Black Clothing (for Baptism): For older children and adults, clothing should be black, loose, and modest. Men may wear a loose-fitting black T-shirt and long shorts. Women should wear a black one-piece bathing suit covered by a black T-shirt or loose garment that falls below the hips, with black shorts. If you are only being chrismated, you do not need black clothing. Infants do not require black garments.

The Towel (for Baptism): Use a new, never used or laundered white towel. If you want it returned, place your initials or name on the tag.

Icon of Patron Saint: Purchase well in advance. Reproductions are fine; hand-painted icons can take months. Bring the icon no later than the Sunday Liturgy before reception. Speak with the clergy to find resources for hand-painted icons if time allows.

Baptism Robe/Outfit: All who are illumined must have a baptism robe or a white outfit. Speak with the priest about where to purchase. For infants, an infant baptismal outfit is appropriate, with a white onesie being the minimum requirement.

Candidacy for Baptism in Great Lent

As Great Lent progresses, the priest determines which catechumens are prepared to be received on Saturday of Lazarus. Beginning in the fourth week of Lent, the Church also prays a special litany for those preparing for illumination.