

The Role of an OCIA Sponsor

The Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA) offers individuals who may wish to enter the Catholic Church an opportunity to examine the faith in a friendly, relaxed atmosphere. A team of lay parishioners and clergy welcome new participants at any time during the year.

OCIA is not a course or class in Catholicism. Rather, it is a gradual, guided period of formation and conversion leading participants toward initiation into the Catholic Church. Initiation into the Church is marked by the celebration of three sacraments as needed: baptism, confirmation, and Holy Eucharist.

The St. John Neumann parish community promises prayerful support for, and to walk with, each prospective new member of the Catholic Church. The role of an OCIA sponsor is the fulfillment of that promise. As a sponsor you are assigned a candidate (baptized adult) or a catechumen (unbaptized adult) whose continuing faith journey you will share.

Being a sponsor is like being a trusted friend. You share what you can about your own faith journey. You offer counsel and support as you are able and to the extent that it is needed or desired. You serve as a bridge to the larger St. John Neumann community. You listen and you pray. Each relationship between a sponsor and a candidate or catechumen is unique. As a sponsor, you walk with a candidate or catechumen through a formation process that culminates with initiation into the Catholic Church.

Many prospective sponsors ask themselves whether they are worthy or qualified. The role of sponsor is not that of catechist. You are not expected to know every aspect of the Church's teaching, but rather simply to be a guide, an example of a Catholic living your faith as best as you can. A sponsor who can admit his or her limitations and who continually tries to grow is an excellent faith model. Sponsors are supported by the parish's OCIA team, members of which can be called upon to help answer a candidate's or catechumen's questions.

A sponsor participates in the OCIA process by accompanying the candidate or catechumen to catechetical sessions held each Tuesday evening from 7:30 to 9 p.m. at the parish. These sessions are facilitated by an OCIA team member and involve an exploration of the Church's teachings within the context of prayer and Scripture. Each session provides for one-on-one discussion between the sponsor and participant.

Additionally, catechumens participate in the Rite of Dismissal, which takes place at the 9:30 a.m. Mass each Sunday. To the best of their ability, a sponsor attends this Mass to support the catechumen. Sponsors do not participate in the Rite of Dismissal.

Sponsors do participate in other brief rites that recognize important steps in the participant's faith formation. These rites usually take place at Mass and occur infrequently throughout OCIA. Finally, a sponsor assumes an active role at the Mass when the candidate or catechumen receives the sacraments of initiation.

The OCIA team provides sponsor training and support, and welcomes inquiries into being a sponsor at any time. Sponsors should be practicing Catholic members of the St. John Neumann parish community. If you are interested in this ministry or have questions about it, please contact Mark Mechler (mechler926@gmail.com). For additional information about the OCIA process, please read the *Frequently Asked Questions about Becoming Catholic/OCIA* in its entirety.