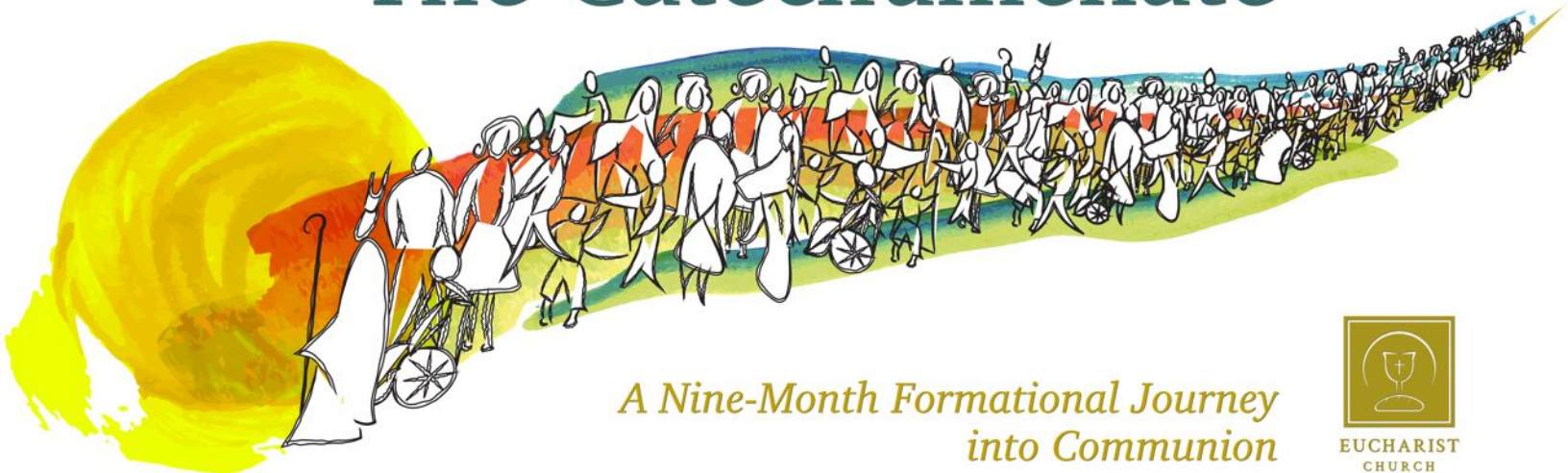


# The Catechumenate



*A Nine-Month Formational Journey  
into Communion*



## **Dates to be aware of:**

*Sunday, November 19, 2017: After Church Catechumenate Q & A Meeting*

*Sunday, December 10, 2017: Application due for Catechumenate*

*Friday, Jan 5 - Saturday, Jan 6, 2018: Catechumenate Retreat (Necessary to be part of Catechumenate)*

## **Executive Summary:**

*The Catechumenate is a 9-month communal experience that synthesizes the life and rhythms of Eucharist Church with an additional layer of relational investment and spiritual formation into a transformational pilgrimage into deeper communion. It begins in January and ends in August. It is open to anyone interested in learning to live all of life in reference to Christ. To participate you must apply no later than December 10 and be able to attend the Catechumenate Retreat in January. The Catechumenate has a limit of 18 people. Priority is given based on application date (i.e apply now!).*

## **Introduction:**

In its original iteration, the early Church's catechumenate existed as a bridge between pagan Roman culture and the distinctive life of the Church in the pre-Christian world of the first three centuries A.D. The catechumenate was a way to imagine, and beyond this, to even taste and feel life as a Christian in the midst of a very different culture. The catechumenate was essential for anyone seeking Christ; it made Christianity intelligible to inquirers by introducing them to a community where it was normal to live all of life in reference to Christ. However, it wasn't just for seekers; all baptized believers also spent at least a season of life in the catechumenate as a way to be enculturated into the distinctly Christian culture of Christ's body and Christ's kingdom. We use the word "culture" because it wasn't simply about learning facts or ideas. It was about taking on embodied practices and learning new ways of relating. That is to say, it was practical and relational.

The Catechumenate that we have created at Eucharist Church echoes this original vision. However, it is uniquely designed to address the challenges of being a Christian in our 21st century context. It provides a bridge from the post-Christian culture of San Francisco into the distinctive culture of Christ's kingdom, which we seek to embody in our local congregation. While it is impossible to address every difference

between the culture of San Francisco and the culture of Christ's Kingdom in a 9-month experience, the catechumenate at Eucharist Church will offer those who participate the ability to take substantial steps towards normalizing a communal life oriented in reference to Christ.

The life we want to "normalize" is the life referred to by Jesus in John 15.

*"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing... As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."* (John 15:5,9-12)

The vision of the Catechumenate is to provide a strategic incubation space, a womb of grace, to learn how to deeply *abide* in Christ together. In order to abide in love, we need to learn the art of self-donation. This begins with a commitment as a cohort of fellow catechumens to embark on a 9-month transformative journey into deeper communion. This is very different from approaching Christ and His body as yet another good to be consumed for one's individual benefit.

In the 9-month cohort, we will learn Benedictine rhythms to orient our time and work to Christ. There will be intentional space to process together about the places of friction between our post-Christian context and our commitment to abiding in Christ together. There will also be places for intimate prayer, disclosure, and confession within the Catechumenate. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, *"In confession the break-through to community takes place"* (Life Together, 112). Within the cohort, there will be structure and stability to allow one's self to be deeply known, even in areas of tenderness, weakness, and pain. We will learn to admit how we fail at being in communion; we will practice forgiveness and reconciliation. The catechumenate isn't theoretical; it is immensely practical and necessarily relational. The cohort is both a place of challenge as well as support and grace. All of this will foster a deep sense of communion and move us toward normalizing a life together in Christ.

It may sound like this is quite a commitment, one that will require sacrifices of time, energy, and vulnerability. That is correct. Any transformative journey of lasting value (the *Camino* in Spain, a pilgrimage to Canterbury, the voyage of the Dawn Treader, a hard fought for marriage) calls forth a level of commitment and perseverance, maybe even suffering. Why do people do this? Because such a collective pilgrimage has the power to transform our souls and lead us into communion.

### **Some Frequently Asked Questions:**

**I've been a Christian for many years... why should I join the catechumenate? Isn't the catechumenate something for seekers or new Christians or those preparing for baptism?**

We believe that even committed Christians would benefit tremendously by spending at least a season or two in the Catechumenate. This is why the staff of Eucharist Church are all participating in the Catechumenate. We recognize that for some, this commitment may not be possible in their present season. No judgment! Just consider this an encouragement and an invitation to consider the catechumenate soon. We all have a long ways to go in order to be people who truly live *all of life in reference to Christ*.

A significant reason to participate in the Catechumenate is that it is a way to really know and be known by a group of local Christians. Some of us have been lucky enough to have had experiences of deep Christian communion in college or in our last church. However, in an urban and transient city like San Francisco, sometimes it can be hard to imagine, much less experience, a shared life in Christ and deep camaraderie apart from measure of structure, stability, and intentionality. This is in part what the Catechumenate is providing.

*Now to the question...*

You should consider joining the Catechumenate if you long for a) deeper personal faith in Christ, b) an increased sense of camaraderie alongside others seeking to live *all of life in reference to Christ*, c) a more substantial rooting of yourself (identity, practices, relationships, desires) in historic Christian faith, and ultimately d) a greater sense of what it looks like and *feels* like to live in sacramental communion (koinonia) as described in the New Testament.

### **What is the time commitment if I join the Catechumenate?**

At the 35,000-foot level, the Catechumenate is a 9-month commitment. It commences with a 2-day retreat at the beginning of January and formally ends at the end of August. You must commit to the entire 9-month journey. Obviously, there will be cases when this commitment may have to be altered due to unforeseen life circumstances. But apart from those situations, we're asking that each person who participates in the Catechumenate take this 9-month commitment serious.

### **Why nine months?**

There's nothing magical about this time period. Though perhaps you may discern a hat tip to the fact that we take 9-months to form in our mother's womb. Practically speaking, this time period works well with our church calendar rhythm.

### **Practically speaking, what does this look like? How does it work?**

The Catechumenate functions around a cohort model where a group of people commit to journey together for 9 months. The cohort functions as a synthesis of the normal rhythms of the church (catechesis, worship, small groups, serving, giving) while adding an additional layer of essential relational and spiritual formation experiences. The 2-day retreat in January sets the tone for the rest of the 9-month experience. You will be introduced to Benedictine spirituality and a variety of best practices of the historic Church for Christian spiritual formation. You will be joined with a *Triad* of two others (of the same gender) who will be your spiritual companions to process with and pray together with each month under the guidance of the Catechumenate Directors. In addition to this, there will be a monthly *Integration Group* that will meet on the first Saturday of each month. These, along with a handful of other opportunities along the way, will allow a depth of communal sharing and knowing that is simply not possible apart from the intentionality and stability of what is offered in the cohort.

### **So what exactly does this require time-wise?**

In addition to full participation in the life of the church (worship, catechesis, small group\*, serving), there is approximately an additional commitment of **4 hours per month**. To put this in perspective, if you did a weekly spin class at a gym, that would be approximately the same investment of time for catechumenate specific activities.

1. **INTEGRATION GROUP:** 2 hours on the first Saturday morning of the month for discussion, processing, and formation as a catechumenate cohort.

2. **TRIAD:** Approx. 2 hours per month to meet with your mutual prayer/confession group (schedule determined by you and the other two members of your group).

\*If a Table Group does not meet in your geographic area, you could also participate in a monthly, regional Community Group. Alternatively, if Eucharist Church is offering an Affinity Group (a group geared around a specific topic such as grief, divorce recovery, addiction, etc.) that is relevant to you, you could participate in such a group in lieu of a neighborhood Table Group or regional Community Group.

Beyond these formal commitments, there will be about 10-15 minutes of assigned reading per week.

### **Do I have to participate in catechesis, worship, small groups, service, and giving in order to participate in the Catechumenate?**

Yes. We're not expecting that you will have a perfect attendance card or anything, but there needs to be an intentional prioritization of the spiritual rhythms of the church. There is a certain ecosystem to what we're trying to accomplish with the Catechumenate that makes all of these elements necessary. If you have specific questions about this, talk to the Catechumenate Directors (Elizabeth and Fr. Ryan).

### **How will my Triad be constructed? What if I don't like my Triad members?**

In order to ensure that all members of the catechumenate know the commitments and spirit of the Catechumenate, there will be short application for all interested parties. As a part of the application there is a space where you can write-in anyone's name(s) whom you would especially like to have in your Triad (assuming they are participating in the Catechumenate). Ideally, this would be a person with whom you already engage in practices of prayer and mutual confession. Though the Catechumenate Directors will consider these names while composing your Triad, we cannot guarantee that this person will be in your Triad. The bottom line is that we want to work with you to create the best possible Triad that we can.

Additionally, it might be helpful to acknowledge that in some cases it is easier to confess to someone new who has agreed to relate in an intentional and structured manner rather than to a friend or buddy with whom you already have a well-established pattern of relating. While still remaining close to your friends at Eucharist Church, it could in some cases be easier to forge new, structured relationships in the context of the Triad rather than trying to re-learn a mode of relating with an established and good friend. (An analogy: sometimes it's easier to become friends with a roommate than to room with a friend.)

### **Can I repeat the Catechumenate? What is the expectation once I complete a 9-month cohort?**

You can repeat the Catechumenate annually. Each year of the Catechumenate will cover different content within a similar structure. Ideally, down the road there will be different tracks (first year, second year, etc.) for the Catechumenate that happen simultaneously. So, there's plenty of factors to encourage a second 9-month stint or more, but the commitment to your cohort is only for 9-months. There is no requirement, or even pressure, to join the Catechumenate for a second year.

Additionally, the goal of the Catechumenate is to normalize a life in Christian communion. After a good time of incubation in the Catechumenate, the hope would be that a person would have become habituated to a life of communion and continue in that life after having left the Catechumenate.

### **What if I have young children? How can I be a part of the Catechumenate?**

We encourage parents to be a part of the Catechumenate. The co-directors (Ryan and Elizabeth Jones) will be new parents themselves during the Catechumenate. It all depends on the other commitments in your life.

MONTHLY INTEGRATION (1<sup>st</sup> Saturday) meeting: There will be on-site childcare provided for Catechumenate members.

TRIAD: Parents can schedule these meetings so that one parent is with the children while the other engages in their group's meeting. These meetings happen on an as-scheduled basis determined by the three members.

CATECHUMENATE RETREAT: We love children and are committed to encouraging spiritual integration between generations. For this reason children are welcome at all *other* Eucharist Church retreats. However, for the Catechumenate Retreat we want to cultivate a kind of focus, bonding, and intentionality that won't work with kids running around. So we encourage parents to have their children stay with friends or relatives. Nursing infants are the exception; they are welcome on the Catechumenate retreat. (If you are interested in the Catechumenate and this is an impeding factor, please talk with Elizabeth or Ryan Jones.)

### **What if I can't make the retreat?**

If you are unable to make the retreat, we encourage you to join the Catechumenate next year. Because this is a journey into communion, it is essential that the Catechumenate cohort has time to solidify as a community at the retreat. Also the retreat will provide an essential foundation for the 9-month journey as well as time to be equipped for sensitive practices like mutual confession.

### **What is the cost of Catechumenate?**

We offer the Catechumenate free of charge. However, we do have to charge for the Catechumenate retreat in order to cover the cost of the facilities. The cost of the Catechumenate retreat is \$225 per person. This includes food, housing, and materials in a beautiful and prayerful context. This is the most "luxurious" of the retreats offered by Eucharist Church in terms of housing and comforts. We will do our best to offer some sliding scale discount or scholarship assistance to those who might need such. If you are interested in the Catechumenate, but you cannot afford the cost, please talk with Elizabeth or Ryan Jones.