



Overview:

The Catechumenate is a three-month communal journey of formation into Christ. Imagine it as a kind of “discipleship intensive”, a “bootcamp” for Christoformity.¹ The Winter 2019 Cohort begins in mid-January and ends in mid-April (Holy Week). 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 16 and be able to attend the Catechumenate Retreat in January as well as the half-day retreat to end the cohort in April (Saturday, April 13th). The Catechumenate has a limit of 10 people. Priority is given based on application date (i.e apply now!).

Theme of the Winter 2019 Cohort: Virtues & Vices - *Discarding the old self, being clothed in the character of Christ*

In this cohort module, our focus will be cultivating virtue and addressing the patterns of sin that inhibit our life in Christ (vices). Historically, the Church has emphasized 7 virtues (three theological virtues - faith, hope, love; four capital virtues - prudence, temperance, justice, courage) and 7 capital sins (envy, vainglory, sloth, avarice, anger, gluttony, lust). We will be exploring these one week at a time from a practice-based approach. We are committed to growing in virtue, not merely talking about virtue.

Foundational Scripture Passage: *“For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”* - Ephesians 4:21-24

Maturity in Christian faith is not primarily about theory or ideas; it’s about knowing and loving God - being formed into the image and person of Christ. This is practical and necessarily communal.

Components of the Catechumenate Experience:

- Retreats (2-day beginning; ½ day ending)
- Weekly cohort gathering (meal, sharing, prayer)
- Dyad/Triad relationships (for prayer, accountability, support)
- Other Activities (a full engagement of the church life):

¹ Christoformity: being formed into the life and identity of Christ, conformed to His image, formed into His body... i.e. *all of life in reference to Christ*

- Weekly Catechesis (9:00-9:45am Sundays)
- Weekly Worship (10:00-11:30am Sundays)
- Involvement in the congregation: serving, giving

Dates to be aware of:

- *Sunday, December 2nd, 2018: After Church Catechumenate Q & A Meeting*
- *Sunday, December 16, 2018: Application due for Catechumenate*
- *Friday, Jan 18 - Saturday, Jan 19, 2018: Catechumenate Retreat (Necessary to be part of Catechumenate)*
- *Saturday, April 13, 2019: Final ½ day retreat for cohort (Necessary to be part of the Catechumenate)*
- *Weekly Meeting (January 22nd - April 9th): Tuesday Evenings (dinner, sharing/discussion, prayer)*

Background | 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. We believe that a 3-month cohort experience, short as that is, 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 3-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.

The 3-month cohort experience is built on Benedictine rhythms and focused on practicing disciplines that build virtue. 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, etc.) 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 time 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 3-month commitment. It commences with a 2-day retreat at the beginning of January and formally ends just as we enter into Holy Week. You must commit to the entire 3-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 3-month commitment serious. If you know that you are going to miss more than 3 of the midweek group experiences, we will encourage you to wait and join the next cohort. Continuity is a high value for us.

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

The cohort functions as a synthesis of the normal rhythms of the church (catechesis, worship, 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 3-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*

or *dyad* 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. The main rhythm of the catechumenate is the weekly dinner, sharing, prayer group. All of these commitments 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, catechumenate group, serving, giving), there is approximately an additional commitment of **2-4 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.

- **TRIAD/DYAD:** We encourage you to invest approx. 30-40 minutes per week (2 hours per month) with your mutual prayer/confession partner(s) (schedule determined by you).

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

Do I have to participate in catechesis, worship, weekly group, 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/Dyad be constructed? What if I don't like my Triad members?

The directors work with those in the cohort to assemble the best possible arrangements. 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/Dyad 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 3-month cohort?

You are welcome to join new cohorts of the Catechumenate as they're available. Each cohort of the Catechumenate will cover different content (rotating themes) within a similar structure. Ideally, down the road there will be different tracks for the Catechumenate that happen simultaneously. So, there's plenty of factors to justify additional stints, but the commitment to your cohort is only for 3-months. There is no requirement, or even pressure, to join the Catechumenate for a second cohort.

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) are parents themselves during the Catechumenate. It all depends on the other commitments in your life. We are not able to provide on-site childcare for the weekly gathering; you will need to arrange this yourself.

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 will handle this as needed (if we have more than 1 child, we'll provide childcare on-site).

What if I can't make the retreats?

If you are unable to make the retreats (beginning and end), we encourage you to join the Catechumenate next time around. Because this is a journey into communion, it is essential that the Catechumenate cohort has time to solidify as a community at the opening retreat. Also the opening retreat will provide an essential foundation for the 3-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 \$200 per person. This includes food, housing, and materials in a beautiful and prayerful context. 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.